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MAYAKOVSKY
AND HIS POETRY



MAYAKOVSKY at his "20 years" Exhibition
 Photograph by Sternberg (1930)

MAYAKOVSKY

AND HIS POETRY

COMPILED

BY

HERBERT MARSHALL

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FOREWORD

I

VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY is to-day acclaimed by the Soviet Union as its unchallenged poetic genius. A poet who expresses in his work the vast gamut of the Socialist Revolution. A man imbued with the most terrific revolutionary energy, with a grasp as wide as his homeland, with a vision that leaps in a flash from the commonplace of a shop-window to the communist commonwealth of the future.

To compress such a life and such a poet into a tiny volume is an almost impossible task. Mayakovsky's collected works run into fourteen volumes. They embrace the whole evolution and revolution of Russia from 1905 to 1930

In these volumes you will find not only poetry but essays, speeches, film scenarios, sketches, plays, advertisements, articles, drawings, posters, stage-designs, portraits.

His poetry includes epigrams, children's verses, rhymed couplets for advertisements, and rhymed captions for posters, agitational poems and lyrical poems, as well as epic poems of Odyssean grandeur, hymns to the Revolution, satires on its enemies, songs to life, and love poems that equal in their passion and imagery Pushkin's lyrics or Shakespeare's sonnets.

In his earlier works Mayakovsky was the rebel-individualist in excelsis. The theme of his poetry then was "I—Mayakovsky—versus the Universe"

In his poem, "A Cloud in Trousers" he saw himself "stalking the world, handsome, twenty-two-year-old" and "shaking it with the might of his voice." In it he sings of his first tragic love and woven with his personal pain is the agony of humanity. He is the champion of the sorrowful ones of the world, the downtrodden and disinherited. In this poem he already prophesied the revolution—and was one year out!

"I,
jeered at by tribal contemporaries,
like a lanky
discarded rhyme,
see that which nobody sees,
coming over the mountains of time.

There, where man's cut short of vision
by the heads of the hungry that surge,
in the thorny-crown of revolution
I see nineteen-sixteen emerge."

But remarkable as his poetry then was, it was still that of the lonely individual spinning for himself a subtle web of words, and was far from being poetry that could be understood and appreciated by the vast mass of the workers and peasants.

When the Revolution came—"his" revolution, as he instantaneously but egotistically claimed it, he realized this more and more. He felt it keenly one day when he was asked to read his poems to sailors of the Baltic Fleet. What could he offer but old poems to those who had *made* the Revolution? He set to work to make a poem worthy of them. He wrote "Left March."

In those stern days paper was scarce—he made posters, painted placards, drew caricatures, wrote captions and verses: whether it was a call for volunteers to join the Red Guards, a warning to citizens not to drink unboiled water, or an appeal for famine-stricken areas—Mayakovsky's verses and posters embraced them all.

Many of his brother poets belittled him for "sinking so low" as to write commercial advertisements for the State, but he saw these advertisements as an educational medium helping to build a new society. He was the modern William Blake fusing picture and poem to build the New Jerusalem.

But Mayakovsky did not stop at posters and printed pages. He grew, with the development of the new society. He determined to get out of his individual self and come into the closest contact with the ordinary people who had made the revolution he sang about. And like a troubadour of old he went from town to town and village to village; from factory to ship, from meeting to theatre; from a tiny Soviet Council to the All-Union Central Committee. Everywhere he declaimed his poems direct to his audience. And the "might of his voice" declared:

"The streets shall be our brushes
the squares, our palettes"

for:

"150,000,000 speak through these
lips of mine."

His technique developed in simplicity and strength with the need to speak direct to the people—in factory, shop, yard, street, square; there

must be no danger of a word being lost, every syllable must come clear and sharp like a machine-gun :

“ Bullets—rhythm
Rhyme—gunfire from building to building.”

The classic forms that had clothed the poetic thought of more static days were shattered and riddled by this fierce verse of revolution.

By thus going among them, and despite (or because of) the novelty of his forms, he got nearer and nearer to the hearts of his countrymen.¹ On one occasion at one of his lecture-recitals he finished up with a poem ending :

“ With Lenin in our heads
and a gun in our hands. . .”

When out of the tightly-packed rows a Red Army man cried out :

“ And your poetry in our hearts, Comrade Mayakovsky ! ”

For the first time in his life, Mayakovsky whose characteristic—pride, almost—was the invariable snappy retort², was at last at a loss for a reply. He was overcome with emotion, and finally said quite simply : “ Thank you, Comrade.”

Mayakovsky is the poet of the city and the worker. Throughout his works there are practically no images of the countryside, there is very little of “ nature ” or “ nightingales,” nothing of the usual clichés of poetry. But you will find boulevards, squares, the bustle of the street, the polish of the asphalt, the noise of machines, the glass eyes of houses, the backbones of roofs, the work of men, the rhythm of revolution, the struggle of society.

He said in one of his speeches (page 140) “ Why must I write about the love of Jack and Jill and not consider myself part of the social organism which is building life ? A poet is not he who goes about with long hair and bleats on lyrical love themes. A poet is he, who in an era of sharpened class struggle, gives his pen into the arsenal of the armed proletariat, and fears no job, however prosaic, and fears no theme, whether of revolution, or the reconstruction of our national economy.”

¹ Lenin, who in general did not take to the “ New Art,” made an exception for Mayakovsky. In her *Memories of Lenin*, Lenin’s widow Krupskaya, tells of a visit that Lenin made to a youth commune during the worst famine years of revolution. The great leader was moved by the enthusiasm and glowing acceptance of sacrifice shown by the students, who in answer to a question blurted out that they preferred Mayakovsky to Pushkin. “ I think Pushkin is better,” replied Lenin with a smile. But Krupskaya continues : “ After that Ilyich (Lenin) somewhat took to Mayakovsky. Whenever he heard that name it reminded him of those young art students, full of life and joy, ready to die for the Soviets, and who, not finding in the contemporary language words to express themselves, sought this expression in Mayakovsky’s rather obscure verse.”

² See *The Captain’s Bridge*, p. 131 et. seq.

young man of talent, encouraged Mayakovsky and helped him to be published. He was indeed the first literary figure to do so.

Then when the Revolution came, there was not the slightest hesitation. The old proverb said: "When the cannons roar the muses are silent." Of our poet it can be said: "When the cannon roared, Mayakovsky thundered." And in the following years he did not despair like many of his comrade poets. He saw the general in the particular, saw the social behind the individual, saw a bright future beyond the dark struggle against intervention, famine and pestilence.

When Lenin died, Mayakovsky felt it deeply, not only as a revolutionary but as if it were his greatest friend. His poem "Vladimir Lenin" is an epic that will rank with the great poems of the world. In no other work of art has the fullness and stature of Lenin been so adequately expressed. This poem, of which I have translated twelve of the fifteen cantos, in length almost half, is about 4,000 lines long.

From 1922 to 1927 Mayakovsky made several trips abroad, visiting Europe and America; all of these found direct expression in his works. His famous poem "My Soviet Passport" is an example of how a through-and-through Soviet citizen reacted to foreign environment.

Then came the tenth anniversary and in commemoration he wrote another epic poem called "Very Good"—a poem that is to the October Revolution as the "Iliad" is to the wars of Troy. The finale is the quintessence of the enthusiasm of the young Soviet citizen. Remember this was written in 1928, when most of the good things subsequently realized were yet to come.

In 1930, just as the Five Year Plan was beginning to make possible the realization of the new society his prophetic genius had sung, and while he himself was engaged on one more epic verse to celebrate it, the impossible happened. Mayakovsky committed suicide.

Once before, when much younger, Mayakovsky is said to have attempted suicide while in a despairing mood. But the revolver had misfired, and the next day he had been himself again. His friends say to-day that, if the revolver had misfired a second time, he would, he must have, recovered. But this is mere supposition. The revolver did not misfire.

How did it come about that such a vigorous man, the incarnation of life, should, as a grown and socially developed personality, set about the repetition of so indefensible an act?

Years later, the State Trials which exposed the canker deliberately injected by hostile forces into so many fields of Soviet life and organization threw light upon this question. At the time of Mayakovsky's death, a number of circumstances combined to load even that mighty back with one too many a straw. Exhaustion, illness, a tragic love affair—and then, at the moment when sympathy was most necessary, a redoubling of attacks

on the part of his enemies, and a seeming neglect on the part of his friends. His last public speech¹, his last completed poetic work, reflect his state of mind. There is a firm justification of his position in the poem "At the Top of My Voice," with all the fury and majesty of a great poet. The self-assertion is no longer a juvenile egoistic clamour to be heard, but the sure and powerful defence in his own chosen medium of all that his poetry had ushered in and stood for. But it was a last effort that drained him utterly. Who were the enemies that persecuted him at this time? The dominating clique of R.A.P.P.², the most influential literary society (since dissolved), was later revealed as a group of Trotskyites, headed by one Averbach, associated with the counter-revolutionary network. One of the favourite methods of these conspirators for disorganizing Soviet work was to demand impossible standards under pretence of zealotry. The whole set of vindictive attacks on Mayakovsky, of all people, on the ground of insufficient closeness to and concern for the masses—arguments that read so absurdly at this distance of time, but which then momentarily hounded and isolated him—bear the smell precisely of those methods. Mayakovsky was indirectly the victim of the same hands that later directly slew the great Soviet writer of the generation preceding him, Gorky.

For a time after Mayakovsky's death, R.A.P.P.'s clique, by exploiting his suicide, even succeeded in hindering the publication of his works, delaying the opening of his museum, and removing his name from the school curricula. These machinations were realized and remedied almost parallel with the discovery and elimination of the general anti-Soviet plots. Stalin has said of him: "Mayakovsky was and is the most talented poet of our Socialist epoch and indifference to his memory is a crime." That this coincides with the feelings of the masses is shown by the fact that the works of Mayakovsky alone among modern poets have run into editions of tens of millions, and his verses are on everyone's lips. For he was, and still is, the songster of their work and their dreams:

"And I, like the spring of humanity,
born in labour and the fighting line,
sing of my society,
this motherland of mine."

II

In this volume the first of its kind in the English language, I have attempted to present an all-round picture in miniature of Vladimir Mayakovsky through his own works. First by his own highly-condensed

¹ For extracts from it see p. 137.

² The Russian Association of Proletarian Writers.

autobiography "I Myself," then by means of his poems, representative of the various phases of his development from his earliest work till his death, and presented in a way that reflects facets of his many-sided genius, a scene from one of his plays (and incidentally the first Soviet play to be written), extracts from a verbatim report of his last public speech made a few weeks before he committed suicide, another verbatim report of one of his many evenings of lecture-declamation, and a report of an important poem about Mayakovsky's life and work written by one of his closest friends with extracts; and at the same time various illustrations, both caricature and straight drawing, as well as photo and sculpture, to give some inkling of his many-sidedness.

Like so many other things Soviet, Mayakovsky's work has remained almost completely unknown to our vast reading public. Those with a special interest in Soviet literature, but without a knowledge of the Russian language, could, for the most part, only find translations and extracts of his poems and odd articles in a few obscure journals, anthologies, and books of literary criticism.

Again, like so many other things Soviet, Mayakovsky's work has not always been described to the English-reading public in the most unprejudiced of lights.

For example, in his *Soviet Russian Literature*, Professor Gleb Struve says about Mayakovsky, *inter alia*: "Finally, and this is most important, he deliberately vulgarized and lowered the poetical vocabulary—to suit the vulgar unrefined taste. Among his pre-revolutionary works his long poem 'A Cloud in Trousers' is typical of what he is capable of, so far as the powerful poetic effects and the unmitigated vulgarity of speech and coarseness of contents are concerned," etc.

This is the typical attitude of an adherent of a defunct hierarchy. I seem to remember a similar outcry somewhat earlier about translating the Bible into the "vulgar tongue!" Horror of horrors, Mayakovsky "deliberately" spoke in the language of the "common" people!

I do not think there is any need to stress the inwardly reactionary and basically undemocratic nature of "pure literary" criticism of this type.¹

¹ The reader of Professor Struve is, of course, expected to take his word about the poetry he is criticizing. Struve does not include extracts to give the reader even a faint idea of the original poems he so contemptuously castigates. One stray quotation, from another poet, in the same work does, however, oddly suggest that this Professor of Russian Literature, himself a Russian, either does not understand the original or else has never read the original. For on page 179 of the same book he says: "Bezimensky's verse is akin to Mayakovsky's—it is coarse, bombastic, declamatory, intentionally devoid of all musicality. His vocabulary is full of vulgarisms. In his 'Poem About Love,' which is a posthumous 'reprimand' to Mayakovsky for his suicide, he calls Dante 'that son of a bitch.'"

We will not reopen in this footnote the question of the ethics of using such phrases in poetry; the point is that Bezimensky said nothing of the kind. In actual fact Bezimensky in this poem was including a quotation from Mayakovsky's own

As myself of the common people I have tried to render into English the "coarseness" of Mayakovsky's language and the richness of his colloquialisms.

Translating Mayakovsky is a tough job, but my feeling is that he fits more easily into the English language than into any other except his own. It is interesting to note that his style was foreshadowed by our own Coleridge, in his poem "Christabel," in which Coleridge made an attempt to break away from the rigid metrical forms of classic poetry. In his preface to this poem Coleridge wrote: "I have only to add that the metre of 'Christabel' is not, properly speaking, irregular, though it may seem so from its being founded on a new principle: namely, that of counting in each line the accents, not the syllables. Though the latter may vary from seven to twelve, yet in each line the accents will be found to be only four. Nevertheless, this occasional variation in number of syllables is not introduced wantonly, or for the mere ends of convenience, but in correspondence with some transition in the nature of the imagery or passion."

"'Tis the middle of night by the castle clock,
And the owls have awakened the crowing cock,
Tu-whit! Tu-whoo!
And hark, again! the crowing cock,
How drowsily it crew."

But Coleridge's innovation, which broke the rigidity of traditional metric forms, did not find its right and proper usage until over a hundred years later in another language, in the works of a poet who never knew how exactly his revolutionary style was foreshadowed by his English predecessor.

For Mayakovsky developed it still further; his real unit is the expressive gesture of the orator, the accent of *meaning*;

Not:

"My verse with labour thrusts through weighted years
emerging ponderous, rock-rough, age-grim,

poem "Jubilee" (see page 70) addressed to Pushkin, in which Mayakovsky posthumously attacks the provocateur D'Anthès who killed Pushkin in the duel that had been deliberately engineered by Pushkin's enemies. Mayakovsky says:

"That aristocratic blackguard, son of a bitch D'Anthès!
We'd have questioned him:
'Your social descent?'
And "Before '17 were you one of the 'Anti's'?"
If only we'd got on to that D'Anthès' scent!"

So through Professor Struve—D'Anthès the provocateur becomes Dante Alighieri. So much for such authorities on Soviet Russian literature.

(It is interesting to note that Prof. Struve has issued a new edition of his *Soviet Russian Literature* in 1944. Quite unaltered as regards the above correction!)

as when to-day an aqueduct appears
firm-grounded once by the branded slaves of Rome."

But :

" My vërse
 with lábour
 thrústs through weighted yéars
emérging
 pónderous
 rock-róugh,
 age-grím,
as whén to-dáy
 an áqueduct appéars,
firm-gróunded once
 by the bránded sláves of Róme."

Almost at a glance the difference is felt, and even more so when read out aloud. Let the reader try it, and he will see that Mayakovsky's staccato lines are not just whims.

These lines may vary from a single syllable

" I "

to an unbroken line like

" and not like the light of long-dead stars arrives,"

where the length and alliteration are appropriate to the image. And of course such a method immediately dispenses with capital letters, except where they should be, at the beginning of a new sentence, or for proper names.

Mayakovsky also made his own punctuation and his own words, but not formalistically. He said : " Our usual punctuation with full stops, commas, etc., is far too poor and limited in expression in comparison with those shades of emotions which the complex man to-day compresses into his poetic productions." That is also a reason why he punctuates, as it were, spatially.

Mayakovsky did not despise rhymes, on the contrary he valued them very much, worked very hard on them. But they are rarely used at short intervals, they echo rather, and that with dissonant resemblance. And his rhyme is for the most part regular through every other main line. Here, of course, is where translation pales the original. Mayakovsky's rhymes are superb, they are apt in meaning, unique in their originality and endless in their variety. I have tried in my translations to rhyme wherever possible, but where the question arose : meaning or rhyme, I have sacrificed rhyme, leaving perhaps just a suggestion of a rhyme.

But so important is the rhyme in the original that I personally feel rhyming must be attempted.

In my translations I have tried as far as possible to keep to the original form. To reproduce in the translation all the syllabic-variations is of course, impossible and unnecessary, but I have kept to the accent, the rhyme, the fundamental rhythm of the whole poem—and above all to the meaning.

And I hope that I have been able to convey also something of the fire and strength of the original.

I want to express my gratitude to the Soviet Government for having given me the unique opportunity of studying and graduating from the Higher Academy of Cinema, and of working in Soviet Cinema, Theatre and Radio for nearly seven years. Only thus did I learn, amongst *many* other things, to love Mayakovsky and his poetry. Only thus did I meet my staunch comrade, fellow-artist and wife—Fredda Brilliant—whose devotion and faith and help in all my artistic work has been unfailing, and who has also expressed, in her sculptured bust of Mayakovsky, another aspect of the “poet blood-all-aboil” who :

“ Abhorred
 every kind of deathliness,
and adored
 every kind of life.”

HERBERT MARSHALL.

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"I" (1912). "Brother Writers" (1915). By Courtesy of Mr. George Reavey.

"Our March" (1917). By Courtesy of the Vanguard Press, N.Y.

"A Most Extraordinary Adventure" (1920). By Courtesy of The Bodley Head, John Lane Ltd.

"Mystery-Bouffe" (1918-21). By Courtesy of G. R. Noyes, Appleton & Co.

"The Captain's Bridge." "In Re Conferences" (1922). By Courtesy of Mr. Robert Herring.

Note to Second Edition:

It is encouraging to the Editors to know that already 3,000 copies of the first edition of this volume have been sold and that there is an increasing demand for it.

This new edition does greater justice to the illustrations and allows us to augment the selection with more examples of Mayakovsky's many-sided genius.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I MYSELF

by VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY, 1893-1930

Theme. I am a poet. That is what makes me interesting. That is what I am writing about. Also about my being in love, or gambling recklessly, or on the beauties of the Caucasus—as long as it settles down in the shape of words.

Memory. Buriyuk¹ said Mayakovsky's memory was like the road to Poltava—everyone leaves his galoshes along it. But I can't remember faces and dates. I only remember that in the year 1100 some "gentility" migrated somewhere. I don't remember the details of the affair but it must have been an affair of importance. To be able to remember—"This thing was written 2nd May. Pavlovsk. The fountains"—is no task at all. So I shall swim freely in the sea of dates.

Main Thing. Was born 7th July, 1894 or 1893²—Mamma's opinion and Father's documents don't coincide. Certainly born no earlier. Birth place—Bagdadi village, Kutais Province, Georgia.

Family. Father: Vladimir Konstantinovich (Bagdadi forest ranger) died in 1906. Mother: Alexandra Alexeyevna. Sisters: Lyuda and Olya.

There was also an Aunt Anyuta. Apparently there are no other Mayakovskys.

First Recollection. Conceptions of pictures. Place unknown. Winter. Father subscribed to the magazine *Rodina* (Fatherland). *Rodina* had a supplement of humour and satire. The funny things were talked about and looked forward to. Father goes around singing: "Allons enfants de la po-chetyri."³ As usual *Rodina* arrives. I open it and suddenly (picture) yell: "How funny! A woman and an uncle kissing." Everybody laughs. Later, when the supplement comes and there is really something to laugh at, it transpires that they had been having fun only at my expense. Thus differed our conceptions of pictures and humour.

Second Recollection. Conceptions of poetry. Summer. Lots of visitors. Tall handsome student—B. P. Glushkovsky.⁴ He drew. Leather-bound album. Magnificent paper. On the paper a lanky fellow without trousers (or maybe in tightly fitting ones) before a mirror. Fellow was called “Eugeneonegin.”⁵ Both Boria and the fellow in the drawing were lanky. Everything clear. I thought Boria was this Eugeneonegin chap. Stuck to this opinion for three years.

Third Recollection. Conceptions of practical life. Night. Endless whispering between Papa and Mamma in next room. About a piano. Did not sleep all night. One single phrase kept running through my head. In the morning dashed full speed: “Papa, what is instalment plan?” Delighted with explanation.

Bad Habits. Summer. Amazing number of visitors. No end of birthday feasts. Father boasted of my memory. Was made to learn poems by heart for every birthday feast. I remember one I learnt for Father’s birthday:

“Once before the mighty throng
Of kindred hills. . . .”⁶

“kindred”⁷ irritated me. Who they were I did not know, but in real life they did not want to come my way. Later I learnt that was “poetical” and began secretly to detest it.

Roots of Romanticism. First house remembered distinctly. Two stories, second was ours. First was winery. Once a year carts of grapes. Grapes were pressed. I ate. They drank. All round was territory of extremely ancient Georgian fortress near Bagdadi. Around the fortress was a feudal wall in the form of a square. At the corners of the walls were stands for cannons. In the walls were turrets. Beyond the walls, pits. Beyond the pits—woods and jackals. Overhanging the woods were hills. Growth. Would run up the highest. Hills lowered to north. In the north a gap in the hills. There, I visioned, was Russia. Had intense longing to go there.

The Unusual. Seven years old. Father would take me along on horseback, on his forest rounds. A path. Nights. Fog. Could not even see father. Very narrow path. Father’s elbow apparently hit against a branch of sweetbrier. The branch slashed with its thorns against my cheeks. Almost shrieking, pulled out thorns. In an instant the fog and the rain disappeared. In an opening in the fog, under our feet, it was brighter than the sky. That was electricity. Prince Nakashidze’s Rivet Works. After seeing electricity, lost interest in nature. Not up-to-date enough.

Study. Taught by mother and by all sorts of female relatives. Arithmetic

seemed implausible. Had to count apples and pears given to boys. But I was used to getting and giving fruit without counting. Fruit is plentiful in the Caucasus. I learnt to read with pleasure.

First Book. Of the *Bird-Seller Agafia*⁸ ilk. Had a few more such books come my way at that time, I would have stopped reading altogether. Fortunately the second was *Don Quixote*. That was a book! Made a wooden sword and shield and waged combat against all and everything.

Examination. Moved from Bagdadi to Kutais. High school entrance examinations. Passed. Questions about anchor (on my sleeve)—answered well. But the school clergyman asked "What does 'oko' mean?" I answered "three pounds" (which it means in Georgian). The courteous examiners explained that "oko" is the ancient-church Slavonic for "eye." I all but failed. So I conceived a hatred for everything ancient, everything churchy and everything Slavonic. Possibly from this sprang my Futurism, my atheism and my internationalism.

High School. Preparatory classes—first and second. Ahead of the class. Rolling in "excellents." Read Jules Verne. And in general anything fantastic. Some bearded fellow discovered artistic ability in me. Taught me gratis.

Japanese War. Increase in number of magazines and newspapers at home. *Russkoye Vedomosti* (The Russian Chronicle), *Russkoye Slovo* (Russian Word), *Russkoye Bogatstvo* (Russian Wealth) and others. Read them all. Unaccountably agitated. Picture-postcards of cruisers were source of delight. Enlarged and copied them. Word "proclamation" appeared in Russian. Proclamations were hung up by Georgians. Georgians were hated by Cossacks. My chums were Georgians. I began to detest Cossacks.

Illegality. My sister came from Moscow. She was jubilant. Gave me long leaflets on the fly. That appealed to me. Very risky. Remember even now. The first:

Think you, my comrade, think you,
my brother.

Throw down your rifle quick on
the ground.

There was also some other one, ending:

Otherwise, the only way—
To the Germans with your son, your
wife and Mamma⁹

(About the tsar.)

That was revolution. That was verse. Revolution and verse somehow blended in my head.

1905

Not in mood for study. Low marks. Passed the exams only because my head was split by stone (had quarrelled on banks of Rion) at the examinations was pitied. For me revolution began thus: a chum of mine, Isidor, a clergyman's cook, jumped up on a stove in his bare feet—rejoicing that General Alikhanov was killed. He was the "pacifier" of Georgia. Demonstrations and meetings. Took part in them. That was good. Thought of participants piously. Anarchists in black, Social-Revolutionaries in red, Social-Democrats in blue, Federalists in other colours.¹⁰

Socialism. Speeches. Newspapers. Derived from them only unfamiliar words and ideas. Demand of myself explanations. In shop windows, pamphlets. *The Stormy Petrel*.¹¹ Deals with the same. Buy up all. Would rise at six. Read voraciously. First: "Down with the Social-Democrats!" Second: "Talks on Economics." All my life have been amazed how Socialists can disentangle facts and systematise world. "What to Read?" by Rubakin¹² I think. Read what he recommended. There was a lot I could not understand. Asked questions. Was taken to a Marxist study circle. They were somewhere in the middle of the "Erfurt program." On "the Lumpenproletariat." Regarded myself as Social-Democrat. Stole father's sawed-off guns and brought them to the Social-Democratic Committee. Lassalle appealed to me. Must have been because he had no beard. Young. Confused Lassalle with Demosthenes. Would go to Rion and make speeches, pebbles in my mouth.

Reaction. In my opinion it began as follows. During panic (maybe after police had attacked) at demonstration in memory of Bauman¹³, I (having fallen) felt a drum come a whopper on my head. I got frightened. Thought I myself had burst.

1906

Father died. Pricked his finger (putting papers together), blood-poisoning. Since then can't bear pins. End of prosperity. After father's funeral we had three rubles left. Instinctively, feverishly, we sold our chairs and tables. Moved to Moscow. Why? Not even acquaintances there.

Journey. Baku best of all. Derricks, cisterns and best perfume—oil; then the steppes. Even desert.

Moscow. Put up at Razumovsky.¹⁴ Plotnikovs—acquaintances of my sister. Next morning Moscow by river-train. Took little flat in Bronnaya Street.

Moscow Affairs. Eat badly. Ten rubles a month pension. I and two sisters study. Mamina takes in lodgers. Room rotten. The students poor. Socialists. Remember Vasya Kandelaki—the first Bolshevik I saw.

Pleasant. Sent me for kerosene. 5 rubles. Got 14 rubles, 50 kopeks change. 10 rubles net earnings. Conscience pricks. Went around shop twice—(had devoured *Erfurt Program*).¹⁵ Who would be out of pocket, owner or the man behind the counter?—asked him on the quiet—the owner! Bought and ate four buns with candied peel. Went rowing with what was left, on Patriarch's Pond.¹⁶ Since then can't bear buns with candied peel.

Work. No money at home. Had to char and draw. Particularly remember Easter eggs. They were round, spun and creaked like doors. The eggs were sold in a handicraft goods shop in Neglinnaya at 10-15 kopeks each. Since then have had holy hatred of Bem,¹⁷ Russian style and handicraft work.

High School. Passed to the fifth class gymnasium. One mark worse than the other. *Anti-Duehring*¹⁸ under the desk.

Reading. Did not accept belles-lettres at all. Philosophy. Hegel. Natural Science. But chiefly Marxism. No work of art ever interested me more than Marx's Introduction . . .¹⁹ Students' rooms become centres of underground work. *Tactics of Street Fighting*, etc. Clearly remember Lenin's *Two Tactics*²⁰ in blue cover. Appreciated that margins of pages had been cut out. For underground smuggling. Aesthetics of maximum economy.

First Halfpoem. The third Gymnasium published an illegal magazine *The Surge*. I felt piqued. Others wrote, but could I? Began to scribble. Result was terribly revolutionary and just as terribly appalling. Can't recall single line. Wrote second poem. Result was lyrical. Did not regard such practice compatible with my "Socialist sense of dignity," so stopped altogether.

1908

Party. Joined Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (Bolsheviks). Sat for examination in commerce and industrial sector. Passed. Propagandist. Carried out propaganda among bakers, then shoemakers and lastly printers. At city conference elected to Moscow Committee. Went under name of "Comrade Konstantin."

Arrest. Caught in raid in Gruzini.²¹ Our illegal printing works.²² Chewed, swallowed notebook. With addresses, binding. Presnia police station. Secret police. Sukhochevskaya police station. Examining magistrate Boltanovsky (apparently considered himself cunning) made me take dictation: the charge against me was writing proclamation. Made no end of mistakes. Wrote "Soshal-dimocratic." Trick fooled them. Released on bail. To my amazement found Artsibashev's *Sanin*²³ in police station and read it. For some reason it was to be found in every police station. Apparently soul-saving.

Released. Year of party work.

1909

Second Arrest. Our lodgers digging tunnel under Taganka Prison.²⁴ To release woman convicts. Succeeded in arranging escape of prisoners from Novinsky Jail. Nabbed me.²⁵ Found revolver and illegal literature. Didn't want imprisonment. Kicked up rows. Transferred from police station to police station—Bassmanaya, Meshchanskaya, Myasnitskaya, etc., at last to Butyrki.²⁶ Solitary confinement No. 103.

Eleven Butyrki Months. For me most important period. After three years of theory and practice began to devour literary works. Read all latest stuff. Symbolists Bely, Balmont. Analysed formal innovations. But all this was alien to me. Themes and images drawn from a life not mine. Tried to write just as well, but about other things. Found that just as well about other things was impossible. Result was banal sobstuff like:

Forests wear garments of yellow
and purple
Fire of the sun on church cupolas
plays
I waited: but days in the months
were extinguished,
Hundreds of languorous days.

Wrote whole copy-book of such verses. Thanks to the warders for taking it off me, when I was released. Otherwise would have published it. After disposing of contemporary writers, plunged into the classics—Byron, Shakespeare, Tolstoy. Last book—*Anna Karenina*. Didn't finish it. Told at night "get your things ready." So don't know how the Karenin business ended. I was released. Should have (secret police so decided) gone to Turukhansk²⁷ for three years. Friend of father, Makhmodbekov, said revolver was his and talked Kurlov²⁸ into letting me off.

While in prison was tried for first offence²⁹—guilty but under age. Released from custody under police surveillance and parental responsibility.

A So-called Dilemma. Came out in state of agitation. The authors I had read were so-called great ones. But how easy to write better than they! I had already acquired a correct attitude towards the world. I needed only experience in art. Where would I find it? I was half-baked. I needed thorough training. Had been kicked out of a number of high schools, even out of Stroganovsky.³⁰ To remain in the Party meant working underground. To work underground, it seemed to me, meant I could not complete my studies. In store for me—writing leaflets all my life and rearranging ideas taken from books which were correct, but had not been thought out by me. If what I had read were shaken out of me, what would remain? The Marxist method. Perhaps it had fallen into the hands of a child. Method easy to use if one were operating with one's own ideas. But when I meet enemies? After all, I could not write better than Bely. He said what he had to say with esprit "To the heavens I threw up a pineapple" while I whimpered: "hundred of languorous days." All right for others to be in the Party. They had a university behind them (higher education—I still did not know what it was—I then actually respected it).

What could I set up against the æsthetics of the past that had avalanched on me? Did not the revolution demand serious training? I went to Medvedev, a Party comrade; wanted to create a Socialist art. He laughed long: "You haven't the guts." I still think he underrated my guts. I stopped Party work. Got down to study!

Beginnings of Craftsmanship. It seemed to me I could not write poetry. Attempts were pitiful. Turned to painting. Studied under Zhukovsky. Painted silver tea-services along with some young ladies. In a year realized I should take up sewing and knitting. Went to Kelin. Realist. Drew well. Very good teacher. Firm.

Demand—craftsmanship. Holbein. Couldn't stand anything pretty.

Last School. Worked on "heads" a year. Entered school of painting, sculpture and architecture. Only place that did not ask for certificate of good conduct. Worked well. Was amazed to find imitators petted and original minds badgered. By revolutionary instinct stood up for the badgered ones.

David Burlyuk. In the school appeared Burlyuk. Arrogant appearance. Lorgnette. Frock coat. Hums and croons while walking. I'd affront him. Almost came to blows.

In Smoking Room. Posh meeting. Concert. Rachmaninov, "Island of Corpses." Fled from unbearable melodized boredom. Burlyuk fled a minute later. Both burst out laughing. Went for stroll together.

A Most Memorable Night. Conversation. From Rachmaninov boredom to school boredom, from school boredom to whole range of classical boredom. David had anger of a master who had outpaced his contemporaries, I, the fervour of a Socialist aware of the inevitable doom of the old. Thus was conceived Russian Futurism.

Next. Next day got poem done. Bits rather. Badly done. Nowhere published. Night. Sretenka Boulevard. Read my stuff to Burlyuk. Said a friend of mine wrote it. David stopped. Looked me up and down, yapped: "You wrote it yourself! You are a genius!" This grandiose and unmerited appellation overjoyed me. Became immersed in poetry. That evening quite suddenly I became a poet.

Burlyuk's Querness. In the morning Burlyuk, introducing me to someone, trumpeted: "Don't you know him. My genius friend. Famous poet Mayakovsky." I tried to stop him. Burlyuk adamant. Leaving me, he bellowed: "Now write or you will make me look a regular fool."

Thus Daily. Had to write. Wrote my first poem (as professional poet—it was published) "Crimson and White and others."

The Exquisite Burlyuk. I think of David with unchanging love. Wonderful friend. My real teacher, Burlyuk made poet of me. Read French and German poets to me. Got me books. Went around talking without stop. Never let me out of his sight. Gave me fifty kopeks daily, so I should not starve while writing.

For Christmas took me with him to "New Beacon."³¹ Took along a poem "Port" and something else.

The "Slap." Returned from the "New Beacon." If with unclear views, then with clearly attenuated moods. Khlebnikov³² in Moscow. His quiet genius was at that time completely over-shadowed by the roaring David. Here, too, was Kruchenykh³³—futurist, jesuit of words.

After a few lyrical nights we gave birth to a joint manifesto. David collected the material, copied it, christened the manifesto and published "A Slap at Public Taste."³⁴

Things Begin to Move. "Jack of Diamonds"³⁵ exhibits. Debates. Fiery speeches by me and David. Newspapers full of Futurism. Tone none too polite. For example they called me simply "A Son-of-a-bitch."

The Yellow Blouse. Never had a suit. Had two blouses—hideous looking affairs. A tried method was to use a tie for decoration. No money. Took a piece of yellow ribbon from my sister. Tied it round my neck. Furore. So the most conspicuous and beautiful thing about a man was his tie. Evidently if you increased the size of the tie, you increased the furore. As there is a limit to the size of a tie, I had resort to cunning. I made a tie-shirt and shirt-tie. Impression—irresistible.

Naturally. The general staff of the arts showed their teeth. Prince Lvov. Director of art school. Suggested we stop criticism and agitation. We refused. The council of "artists" drove us out of the school.

A Jolly Year. Travelled up and down Russia. Lectures. Governors of the provinces got wary. In Nikolayev were told to mention neither the authorities nor Pushkin. Police often stopped our lectures as soon as the speaker opened his mouth. Our cohort was joined by Vasia Kamensky, oldest of the Futurists.

For me this was a period of work on form, of mastering the poetic word.

Publishers did not touch us. Their capitalistic nose sensed dynamiters in us. They did not buy a single line from me.

When in Moscow, we lived usually on the Boulevards.

The crowning event of this period was the tragedy "Vladimir Mayakovsky." Produced in Luna Park, St. Petersburg.³⁶ It was booed to shreds.

1914

Beginning. Sense of craftsmanship. Could master my themes. Raise question of theme. In all urgency. Revolutionary theme. Am pondering over "A Cloud in Trousers."³⁷

War. Took it excitedly. At first thought of it in its decorative and noisy aspects. Poem, "War Declared." Draw posters to order.

August. First engagement. The horror of war stared us in the face. War hideous. Rear still more hideous. To speak about the war, must see it. Tried to enrol as volunteer. Not accepted—unreliable.

Even Colonel Moldi³⁸ had one good idea.

Winter. Disgust at and hatred of war. "Ah, Close, Ah, Close the Eyes of Newspapers"³⁹ and others.

Lost all interest in Art.

1915

May. Won 65 rubles. Went to Finland, Kuokkala.

Kuokkala. Seven friends system (seven-fold rotation). Established seven dinner friendships. On Sundays "ate" Chukovsky. Monday Evreinov, etc. Thursday was worse—ate Repin's grass.⁴⁰ For a futurist six-footer that would not do at all.

In the evenings stroll along the beach. Wrote "A Cloud in Trousers." Heightened awareness of the approaching revolution.

Travelled to Mustamaki. Maxim Gorky. Read him parts of "Cloud." Gorky touched—wept on my shoulder. Poem affected him. I was a little proud.

New Satyricon. 65 rubles went easily and painlessly. Wondering whatever to eat, began to write for *New Satyricon*.⁴¹

Most Joyful Date. July, 1915. Made acquaintance of L.Y. and O.M. Brik.⁴²

Called Up. Taken into army. Did not want to go to front. Pretended I was draughtsman. At night learned from engineer how to draw auto-designs. Matters stood worse with getting stuff published. Soldier forbidden to publish. Only Brik gave me cause for joy. Bought all my poems at 50 kopeks a line. Published "Flute of Spine" and "A Cloud in Trousers." "Cloud" proved feathery. Censor blew through it. Six pages full of dots.

Since then hate dots. And commas, too.

Soldier's Life. Many time. Draw portraits of superiors (trying to evade service). "War and the Universe," grows in my head; "A Man"⁴³ in my heart.

1916

Finished "War and the Universe," a little later "Man." Published parts in *Annals*.⁴⁴ Arrogantly evade service.

1917

26th February. Went with automobiles to Duma. Got into Rodzianko's⁴⁵ office. Had a look at Milyukov.⁴⁶ He was silent. For some reason I think he stammered. After an hour there we got fed up. Left. For a few days took command of auto school. Guchkov Guchkovizes.⁴⁷ The old Officer

caste strutted around the Duma as of old. For me it was clear that the Socialists must inevitably replace it. The Bolsheviks. From the outset of the revolution, writing a verse-chronicle—"Revolution."⁴⁸ Read lectures on "Bolsheviks of Art."

August. Gradually Russia was de-Kerenskyised. He no longer commanded respect. Leave *New Life*. Conceive "Mystery-Bouffe."⁴⁹

October. To accept or not to accept? For me (as for the other Moscow Futurists) this question never arose. It is my revolution. Went to Smolny. Worked. Did everything that came my way. Meetings began to be held.

1918

January. Visited Moscow. Spoke. Night time—Poet's Café on Nastasyinsky Pereulok⁵⁰ (the revolutionary Grandmother of present-day Salon Café). Wrote film script. Appear in it myself.⁵¹ Draw posters for cinema. June. Again St. Petersburg.

25th October. Finished "Mystery-Bouffe." Read it. Much talk about it. Produced three times, then it was hammered. Then replaced by *Macbeths*.

1919

Go with "Mystery" and other things of mine, and with colleagues, to various factories. Enthusiastic reception in Vyborg district (in Leningrad), a "comfit"⁵² is organized, we publish *Art of the Commune*.⁵³ Fissures in Academies. In Spring move to Moscow.

Head filled with "150,000,000."⁵⁴ Propaganda work in ROSTA.⁵⁵

1920

Finished "150,000,000." Published it without my name. Wanted anyone who wished to continue and improve it. Nobody did, but everyone knew who wrote it, all the same. Publishing it now under my name.

Days and nights in ROSTA. All kinds of Denikins are advancing. Write and draw caricatures. Made about 3,000 posters and 6,000 titles.

1921

Break through walls of muddling, hate red tape and stupidity—produce a second version of "Mystery"—on the boards of First R.S.F.S.R. Theatre and in the circus, in German, for the delegates to the Third Congress of the Comintern.

Began to write for *Izvestia*.⁵⁶

1922

Organize M.A.F.⁵⁷ Publishing House. Gather together the Futurists of the Commune. Aseyev⁵⁸ and other comrades-in-arms arrived from the Far East. Began to write a thing developing in my mind for three years. "The Fifth International." Utopia, showing art 500 years hence.⁵⁹

1923

We organize L.E.F.⁶⁰ L.E.F. equals coverage of great social themes through all of Futurism's resources. The definition is not exhaustive. Those interested should read the issues.

Wrote "About This." Personal motifs on the theme of general life.

Began to think over the poem "Lenin." One of the slogans and also one of the big achievements of L.E.F. is de-aestheticising of the productive arts, i.e., constructivism. Poetic supplement: the agitational pieces and agitation on behalf of industrial and trading establishments, i.e., advertisements. Despite poetic adhering, I consider my "Nowhere but in Messelprom" poetry of the highest calibre.⁶¹

1924

"Memorial to Kursk Workers."⁶² Numerous lectures up and down the U.S.S.R. on L.E.F. "Jubilee"—to Pushkin⁶³ and a whole cycle of such poetry. Travel: Tiflis, Yalta—Sevastopol, Tamara and "The Demon," etc. Finished poem "Lenin." Read it at many workers' meetings. I felt very nervous about this poem, as it would have been easy to reduce it to a pamphlet in verse. The workers' attitude to it gladdened me and confirmed my conviction that the poem was needed. Travelled much abroad. European technique, industrialism, any attempt to combine them with old Russia, still backward—such has always been the idea of the Futurist-Leftists.

Despite the none-too-encouraging figures on the sales of the magazine, *L.E.F.* is enlarging the scope of its work.

We know that these figures frequently mean simply that the huge, cold machinery of G.I.Z.⁶⁴ shows a bureaucratic lack of interest in certain magazines.

1925

Wrote agitational poem "The Flying Proletarian" and a collection of agitational verses "Walk the Heavens Yourself."

Travel around the globe. At the beginning of the journey—my last of a number of poems on the theme "Paris." I want to and am going to change from poetry to prose. This year I should finish my first novel.

Around-the-globe was a flop. Firstly, was robbed in Paris; secondly, after half a year of travelling, rushed back to the U.S.S.R. Did not even go to San Francisco (where I was invited to lecture). Travelled through

Mexico, U.S.A. and bits of France and Spain. Result—books of publicistic prose. “I Discover America” and verses “Spain,” “Atlantic Ocean,” “Havana,” “Mexico,” “America.”

Wrote out novel in my head, but did not transfer it to paper. While writing it out in my head, began to detest what I had imagined. Demanded real facts and real names. By the way, this holds good also for 1926 and 1927.

1926

In my work I am consciously becoming a newspaper man. Feuillettons, slogans. Poets badger me but can't do newspaper stuff themselves, for the most part getting their stuff published in irresponsible supplements. To me their lyrical trash is just funny, it's so easy to write like that and it interests no one save the spouse.

Wrote for *Izvestia*, and other newspapers.

My other work: I continue the traditions of the troubadours and minstrels. Travel from city to city, reciting my verses. Novocherkassk, Vinnitsa, Kharkov, Paris, Rostov, Tiflis, Berlin, Kazan, Sverdlovsk, Tula, Prague, Leningrad, Moscow, Voronezh, Yalta, Eupatoria, Viatka, Ufa, etc.

1927

Resumed publication (there was an attempt to close it down) of *L.E.F.*, now *New L.E.F.*⁶⁵

Its main plank; opposition to invention, aestheticism, and psychologism in art—it favours agitational pieces, high-class publicistic and chronicle material. My main work is in “Komsomolskaya Pravda.” Work overtime on “Good.”⁶⁶

I regard “Good” as a programme poem, a sort of “Cloud in Trousers,” for the present-time, but down on abstract poetical devices (hyperbolism, self-sufficient images) and invent vignette-like devices for elaboration of chronicle and agitational material.

Ironie pathos with description of details that may prove a sure step into the future; the introduction for creation of suspense, of facts of different historical calibres legitimate only through personal associations.

Will elaborate all this.

Further: have written filmscripts and children's books.⁶⁷

Am still the travelling minstrel. Have collected about 20,000 questions from listeners. Am thinking of writing a book *The Universal Answer* (to questions).⁶⁸ I know what is in the minds of the reading masses.

1928

Write poem: “Bad,”⁶⁹ a play and my literary biography. Many people have said: “Your autobiography is not seriously written.” Right! I am not yet academicised and am not in the habit of fussing about myself

and what's more, I am interested in the business of myself only when things hum. The rise and fall of many literatures, of symbolists, realists and so on, as well as our struggle with them—all of which has taken place before my eyes—constitutes part of our most momentous period of history. It needs to be written about. And write about it I will.

COMMENTARY

1. A friend of Mayakovsky—artist and poet (now working in New York).
2. Mayakovsky was born on 19th July (old style 7th July), 1893.
3. Opening words of the Marseillaise (*Allons enfants de la patrie . . .*) "Patrie" sounds the same as the Russian for "three times." Mayakovsky's father always sang "Po-chetyri"—Russian for "four times."
4. A friend of the Mayakovsky family.
5. Eugene Onegin—hero of a novel in verse by Pushkin. Mayakovsky wrote the given name and surname together.
6. Opening lines of a poem by Lermontov.
7. In Russian *soplennoy*—an archaic word.
8. *Bird-Seller Agafia*—a sentimental "uplift" children's book.
9. Lines from two well-known revolutionary songs.
10. Mayakovsky here refers to the pre-revolutionary petty bourgeois and working class parties. Federalists—the Georgian bourgeois-nationalist party.
11. A famous poem by Maxim Gorky which heralded the coming revolution like a "stormy petrel."
12. A popular guide to reading.
13. Well-known revolutionary killed during the 1905 revolution.
14. Country place near Moscow.
15. Erfurt Programme—the programme of the German Social-Democratic party adopted in 1891 at its congress in Erfurt.
16. Pond in Moscow.
17. Elizabeth Bem—artist, made drawings in "Russ" style.
18. Mayakovsky refers to Engels' book *Anti-Duehring*.
19. Mayakovsky apparently refers to the introduction to Marx's "Capital." Mayakovsky knew by heart long passages of this introduction.
20. Mayakovsky refers to Lenin's well-known book *The Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*.
21. A district in Moscow.
22. Mayakovsky was arrested for the first time on 24th March, 1908, during the destruction of a secret printing works run by the Moscow Committee of the Bolshevik Party. He was only fourteen at the time.
23. *Sumin*, a reactionary, semi-pornographic novel by Artsibashev. Enjoyed sensational success among a section of the Russian intelligentsia, in the period of ideological chaos and despondency following the suppression of the first revolution in 1905. The reaction used this novel at times even directly for its own ends; it was given to political prisoners in the police station for their "enlightenment."
24. A prison in Moscow.
25. Actually this was Mayakovsky's third arrest. He was arrested for the second time in January, 1909, but was soon released owing to lack of evidence. He was arrested for the third time on 1st July, 1929, on a charge of participating in the organization of a successful escape of several women political prisoners.
26. Prison in Moscow.
27. Town in Siberia, where revolutionaries were banished.
28. Chief of the Department of Police.
29. On secret printing works case.

30. Industrial Arts school. Mayakovsky had studied in it for several months prior to his last arrest.
31. An estate in the south of Russia, of which Burlyuk's father was overseer.
32. Gifted Russian poet, a friend of Mayakovsky and Burlyuk.
33. Experimental poet.
34. Mayakovsky's first two poems were published in an anthology bearing this title.
35. The name of a society of young artist innovators.
36. The tragedy "Vladimir Mayakovsky," Mayakovsky's first important work, was produced by the "Youth Union," a society of artists, in St. Petersburg, in December, 1913.
37. The original title of this poem, banned by the censor, "The Thirteenth Apostle."
38. Chief of the Moscow Secret Police.
39. From the poem "Mother and the Evening Killed by the Germans."
40. Chukovsky—well-known children's writer, literary critic and historian. friend of Mayakovsky. Evreinov—theatrical producer. Repin—the famous Russian painter, was a vegetarian.
41. A satirical weekly.
42. Close friends of Mayakovsky.
43. Two long poems written by Mayakovsky in 1915 and 1916.
44. A magazine published by Gorky. In 1916 the censor banned *War and the Universe*. It was published only after the revolution.
45. Chairman of the Fourth State Duma.
46. Milyukov—leader of Russian liberalism, ideological spokesman of Russian imperialism. Held post of Foreign Minister in the first Provisional Government, after the revolution of February, 1917. After the October Revolution inspired counter-revolutionary war against the Soviet Government, supported foreign intervention.
47. Guchkovize—a verb invented by Mayakovsky from the name Guchkov. Guchkov was an influential Moscow industrialist and a well-known bourgeois political figure. Following the February revolution he was Minister of War in the Kerensky government.
48. The verse-chronicle "Revolution" was written by Mayakovsky in April, 1917. It was published in *New Life*, a periodical edited by Maxim Gorky.
49. "Mystery-Bouffe," a dramatic production—"A heroic, epic and satirical representation of our epoch" (see page 47).
50. A café organized by the poets Kamensky, Burlyuk and Mayakovsky.
51. Mayakovsky wrote the scripts for and performed the leading roles of three films "The Young Lady and the Hooligan," "Born Not for Money" (after Jack London's "Martin Eden") and "Chained by the Film."
52. A group of Communist futurists.
53. A newspaper specially devoted to questions of art, on which Mayakovsky worked. It appeared during 1918 and 1919.
54. The poem "150,000,000."
55. ROSA—The Russian Telegraph (now *Tass*) Agency which at this time was engaged in agitational art work, as it is now again in the present war.
56. Mayakovsky began to work for the newspaper *Izvestia* at the beginning of 1922. "In the Conference," his first poem to appear in *Izvestia* was noticed and approved by Lenin. (A translation of this poem is on page 65.)
57. M.A.F.—Moscow Association of Futurists.
58. A well-known Soviet poet, a friend and colleague of Mayakovsky.
59. Mayakovsky did not finish this poem.
60. "L.I.F."—Left Front of Art, also the title of a magazine edited by Mayakovsky.
61. During the period of restoration of Soviet economic life, Mayakovsky wrote advertisements in verse for State trading organizations. "Nowhere but in Mosselprom" was an extremely popular advertisement in verse written by Mayakovsky.

- 62. A poem dedicated to Kursk workers, heroes of socialist labour.
- 63. A poem written on the 125th anniversary of birth of Pushkin. (See page 70).
- 64. G.I.Z.—State Publishing House.
- 65. The magazine *New L.E.F.* appeared under Mayakovsky's editorship in 1927 and 1928.
- 66. "Very Good"—poem written by Mayakovsky for the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution (for Section 19, see page 126).
- 67. Altogether Mayakovsky wrote fifteen film scripts and thirteen children's books.
- 68. Mayakovsky intended to write a book of answers to questions submitted to him by his innumerable audiences. The book was never written.
- 69. The poem was not written. In 1928 and 1929 Mayakovsky wrote two plays "Bed-Bug" and "Bathhouse," and began to work on a poem about the Five-Year Plan. He actually wrote only the introduction "At the Top of My Voice" (on page 140).

THE EGOIST

A CLOUD IN TROUSERS (1915)

Note by Herbert Marshall

THIS poem was written in 1915, when Mayakovsky was—as he himself says "handsome—twenty-two-year-old." Its impetus came from his first love, and as is usual with Mayakovsky's work the characters and places are real. "In Odessa it happened."

Kamensky in his "Youth of Mayakovsky" says:

"Odessa; here Mayakovsky fell in love with the beautiful Marya Alexandrovna and from this unexpected accident 'went out of his mind.'"

"He 'roared and stormed' and in general didn't know what to do, where to go with this surging love."

"Seventeen-year-old Marya Alexandrovna belonged to that group of picked girls of that time, in whom was combined first-class fascinating appearance and intellectual strivings toward all that was new, contemporary, revolutionary."

"Shapely, fascinating, 'with eyes of the southern night' she at once became in the imagination of the poet:

" 'I saw one thing only:
You were—a Giaconda
that had to be stolen!
And they stole you.'"

"Nineteen-year-old Mayakovsky had never yet experienced love, and for the first time tasted this great feeling, with which he couldn't cope."

In his brief autobiography Mayakovsky says nothing about Marya, but under the year 1915 he records that he wrote "A Cloud in Trousers," and read parts of it to Maxim Gorky.

And Maxim Gorky was the first writer in print to defend Mayakovsky. In the "Journal of Journals," April 1915, he wrote :

"Take for example Mayakovsky—he's young, only 20 years old, he is vociferous, unbridled, but undoubtedly somewhere underneath talent is hidden. He needs to work, to study and he will write good, genuine poetry. I have read his book of poems. Some of them arrested my attention. They are written with genuine words."

Mayakovsky called "A Cloud in Trousers" a *tetrptych*, and it was planned in four parts with four cries :

1. "Down with Your Love"; 2. "Down with Your Art"; 3. "Down with Your Society"; 4. "Down with Your Religion."

The translation is not complete. Part I and Part II are in full, Part III excepts lines 369/434 and 525/534. These lines and the whole of Part IV are not yet translated.

This is the first translation into the English language yet to have been made (except for the short prologue).

I have tried as far as possible to clear up any obscurities by means of footnotes. The reader must bear in mind this poem was written in Russia in 1915, under the Czarist regime, in the midst of an imperialist war, and when Mayakovsky was in his most "futurist" period. From that background it emerges as if it were indeed the last despairing cry of man facing the Universe naked and alone :

" My last cry,
you at least
shriek through the ages, that I'm ablaze ! "

A CLOUD IN TROUSERS

A Tetrptych

Prologue

Your thoughts,
dreaming on a softened brain,
like an over-fed lackey on a greasy settee,
with my heart's bloody tatters I'll mock again ;
impudent and caustic, I'll jeer to superfluity.

Of grandfatherly gentleness I'm devoid,
there's not a single grey hair in my soul !
Thundering the world with the might of my voice,
I go by—handsome,
twenty-two-year-old.

Gentle ones !
You lay your love on a violin.
The crude lay their love on a drum.
But you can't, like me, turn inside out entirely,
and nothing but human lips become !

Out of chintz-covered drawing-rooms, come
and learn—
decorous bureaucrats of angelic leagues.

And those whose lips are calmly thumbed,
as a cook turns over cookery-book leaves.

If you like—
I'll be furious flesh elemental,
—or changing to tones that the sunset arouses,—
if you like—
I'll be extraordinarily gentle,
not a man, but—a cloud in trousers !

I don't believe flowery Nice exists at all !
Once more a song in praise I proffer
to men, bedridden as a hospital,
to women worn-out as a proverb.

I

You think it's the ravings of malaria ?

It happened.
In Odessa it happened.

" I'll see you at four," said Marya.

Eight.
Nine.
Ten.
And then.

Evening
fled from the window,
Decemberish,
giving a last
nocturnal leer.

Behind its decrepit back the sniggering gibberish
of chandeliers.

No one would recognise in me
this muscular mass
that groans
at a touch.
What can this great clod want
so desiringly ?
Ah, but a clod can want so much !

After all it isn't so important for me
that I'm of bronze,
that my heart's of iron-cold roughness.
At night I want to hide my sonority
in feminine
softness.

And so,
massed at the window
a hunched-up clod,
over the pane my brow goes skittering.
Will it be love or not ?
What kind—
a big or a tiny little thing ?
How could it be big from such a body ;
it's sure to be a tiny timid little lovekin.
Fearful of the traffic's crack-pot din.
Loving the sleigh-bells laughing tinkle.

Sprayed by the city's tidal roar,
I stick my face into the rain's pocked face,
and more and more
I wait and wait.

Midnight races, with knife upheld,
overtakes
and strikes,—
there goes the clock.

The twelfth hour fell
like the victim's head from the executioner's block.

On the glass grey raindrops gurgled
so loud,
massing grimaces in damp array,
till it seemed the very gargoyles howled
on La Notre Dame de Paris.

Damn her !
That's all it needs to crack my impatience.
A cry twists my mouth to a crumpled curve.
Then :
like a jittery bed-ridden patient
up jumped—
a nerve.
At first
it hardly moved,
then ran
in an excited
rhythmic beat.
Till it was joined by another two,
tap-dancing in mad cataclysmic leaps.

In the room below the ceiling crashed down.

Nerves,—
big,
little,
hundreds of 'em !
jerk and jump madly,
till now
the nerves' very knees are giving way under them !

Night is oozing and oozing through the room ;
Can't pull heavy eyes from the ooze-ridden street.

Suddenly the door
ground its jaws in the gloom,
as if the hotel's own teeth didn't meet.

You entered
brusquely as "Take it or leave it!"
Torment-twisting the gloves you carried
and said:
"You may not believe it,—
but I'm getting married."

So what,
get married.
I master my impulse.
See I'm perfectly calm—
of course!
like the pulse
of a corpse.
Remember?
You said:
"Jack London,
love and passion,
blood and gold, and . . ."
I saw one thing only:
You were—a Giaconda
that had to be stolen!
And they stole you.
Once more, love-lorn, I'll carouse,
fires lighting up my darkened brows.
So what!
Sometimes in a burnt-out house
live homeless down-and-outs.

You mock me?
"Less than a beggar's mite
is your emerald madness cherished."
Remember!
When Vesuvius was mocked one night
Pompeii perished!

Hey!
Gentlemen!
Dabblers unappalled
in sacrilege,

slaughter,
crime and harm,—
have you seen
the most terrible thing of all—
my face
when
I'm
absolutely calm ?

And I feel
that " I "
is for me too shallow.
Someone bursts out of me and won't be smothered.

Hallo !
Who's speaking ?
Mother ?
Mother !
Your son is beautifully ill !
Mother !
His heart is on fire !
Tell Lyuda and Olya,¹ their brother
cannot escape this pyre.
Every word,
even platitudes,
vomited by my reeking mouth-hell,
hurl themselves out, like naked prostitutes
from a burning brothel.
People sniff—
something's smoking !
Ring the alarm then !
They drive up.
Shining !
In helmets gold-crested !
Not with hob-nails on !
Tell the firemen :—
On burning hearts you climb with caresses.
I'll do it.
From tear-ridden eyes barrelsful come.
Let me escape from my ribs for a start.
I jump ! I jump ! I jump ! I jump !
I crashed back.
You can't jump out of your heart !

From my flaming face,
 through parched lips crevicing,
 charred kisses leap out
 burnt with desire.

Mother !
 I can't sing.
 In the church of my heart the choir is on fire !
 As children from a burning building fly,
 scorched figures and words
 surge from my cranium.
 Thus in fear
 clutching at the sky,
 stretched out
 the burning hands of the Lusitania.

Jolting people
 the hundred-eyed red sky
 jabs the roomy quiet
 with its dawn-sharp rays.
 My last cry,
 you at least
 shriek through the ages, that I'm ablaze !

II

Glorify me !
 I and the great am no compare.
 I place 'nihil '
 on everything that's gone before.

I never want to read anything,
 anywhere.
 Books ?
 What're books for ?

Books are made like this :—
 I used to think—
 A poet comes along, lips half-parted—
 and at once inspired the simpleton starts to sing,—
 And there you are then !

But before he can begin to sing,
 it turns out,
 he moons around, calloused from fermentation,
 and in the ooze of his heart there wallows about
 the foolish flounder of imagination.
 But while they boil down, strumming with rhymes,
 some sort of concoction from loves and nightingales—
 the tongueless street twists and writhes,—
 having nothing with which to talk or wail.

We'll raise once more, becoming proud,
 Babylonian towers' enskying reach ;
 But the city God ploughed
 to a field, confusing human speech.

Torment silently nauseates the street.
 Out of its gullet projects a vertical yell.
 Plump taxis and skinny droshkies meet
 get stuck across its throat and swell.
 Its breast pedestrianised.
 Consumption imbued.

With darkness the roadway was barred by the town.

But when—
 for all that !—
 on to the square the crowd outspewed,
 thrusting from its throat the porch that pressed it down,
 it seemed :
 A choir of archangels choralled out—
 God goes to punish, being robbed !
 But the street sat down and gave a shout :
 " Let's get some grub ! "

Krupps and Kruppies camouflage the town
 with threatening furrowed brows,
 but in the mouth
 dead words decompose and stink,
 only two survived, getting plumper now,
 " skunk "
 and another
 " borshch " I think.

Poets,
 drenched in tears and lamentations,
 rushed from the streets, with manes askew :
 " How can you sing those two in concatenation
 with ' maiden,'
 and ' love,'
 and ' flowerets in the dew ' ? "
 Street-thousands
 trailed after the poets :
 students,
 builders,
 prostitutes.
 Ladies and Gentlemen !
 You're not beggars !
 Stow it !
 Don't dare ask for arms like destitutes !

We seven-league-striding healthy men
 must not listen, but tear them to shreds —
 they,
 who attach themselves as free supplements
 to every double-bed !

Fancy asking them :
 " Help me ! "
 appeasing crazy whims.
 Praying with hymns
 and oratorios !
 We ourselves are the creators of blazing hymns—
 the roar of factories and laboratories.

What's Faust to me,
 a fairy rocket
 Slithering with Mephistopheles on the heavenly parquet !
 I know—
 a nail in my boot that's hurting
 is nightmarish more than the fantasy of Goethe.

By my every word
 body and soul are born again,
 I,
 the eloquent golden-tongued,
 say unto you :

The tiniest particle of living men
is more valuable than all I have done or do.

Listen !

Moaning and groaning
they preach,
to-day's screeching-lipped Zarathustras !³
We
with faces, like slept-on sheets
with lips, suspended like hanging lustres,
we,
prisoners of the city-lazarhouse, grew
where gold and dirt have ulcerated leprosy,—
we are purer far than Venetian blue,
washed simultaneously by sun and sea !

To hell that in Homeric and Ovidian hymns
there's no one like us,
pitted with sooty pox-holes.
I know—
the very sun would grow dim
seeing the golden scatterings of our souls !

Truer than prayers are muscles and veins.
The mercy of the times shall we prayerfully enlist ? !
We hold—
each of us—
the world's bridle reins
in our five-fingered-fist !

That was charged at Golgotha, by the auditoriums
of Petrograd, Moscow, Odessa vying,
and not one
that wasn't heard roaring :
“ Crucify,
Crucify him ! ”
But to me—
people,
and those who have hurt me—
you are nearer and dearer, all else eclipsing.

Have you seen,
how a dog licks the hand that whips it ?

I,
 jeered at by tribal contemporaries,
 like a lanky
 discarded rhyme,
 see that which nobody sees,
 coming over the mountains of time.

There where man's cut short of vision
 by the heads of the hungry that surge,
 in the thorny-crown of revolution
 I see nineteen sixteen emerge.

And I amongst you—am its prophet ;
 wherever pain is—there am I ;
 On every single tear that's shed
 I myself am crucified.
 To all forgiveness I call a halt.
 I've seared my soul, where gentleness bred still.
 That's far more difficult, than to assault
 a thousand thousand Bastilles !

And when
 it arrives,
 by rebellions accompanied,
 and you go to greet your saviour with hosannas—
 I will
 tear out my soul for you,
 to make it big
 stamp on it !
 and hand it to you,
 bloodstained as a banner.

III

*(sections omitted : from lines 369 to 434
 and lines 525 to 534)*

Suddenly
 clouds
 and skyey etceteras
 were shaken up,
 raising an incredible shindy in the sky,
 as if white workers were breaking-up,
 having declared to the heavens a furious strike.

From behind stormclouds thunder emerged, ferociously,
blew its colossal nose with a reverberating bark,
and the skyface for a second twitched rapaciously
in the grim grimace of an iron Bismarck.

And someone,
astray in the cloud-crowded beams,
reached out his hand to the café through the air,
it seemed very feminine,
very gentle it seemed,
and it seemed a gun-carriage there.

You think—
it's the sun that gently, as if
on the cheeks of the café, trembles ?
Once again it's General Gallifet⁴
marching to shoot down rebels !

Hey, passers-by, take your hands from your pockets—
pick up a bomb, a knife or a stone,
and those without hands, or arms in their sockets—
come and batter with bare brows alone !
Come, you hungryites,
sweatyites,
got-no-rights,
souring in a filthy flea-ridden flood !
Come !
You Mondayites, Tuesdayites, workdayites,
let's paint the holidays red with blood !

Trembling under the knife let the earth remember
whom it wanted to vulgarise yet more,
that earth,
overfed and pampered,
like a Rothschild's beloved paramour !
Let the flags flutter in a fury of cannon-fire,
like at every respectable holiday-rite—
lamp-posts, raise yet higher
the bloody carcasses of parasites.

Someone swears,
someone kills,
someone prays,
climbing after someone
alongside someone cried.

In the sky, red as the Marseillaise,
shuddering in its death-throes, the sunset died.

Nothing will happen.

Already insanity.

Night will come,
bite
and eat its repast.
Once again the sky is judased,
see—
splashed by the treachery of a handful of stars.

It's come.
Feasting, Mamai⁵
perches his behind on the city that's left.
Eyes cannot pierce such a night,
black as Azev!⁶

Flinging myself in a pub, I shrink down inside,
pour wine on the cloth and my soul's smart,
and see :
in the corner two round eyes,
great eyes of the Madonna eat into my heart.
Why present your radiance, Little Mother,
stereotyped daub to public house rabbles !
See—once again
they spit on Golgotha
and choose Barabbas ?

Maybe, purposely,
in this human mash and scum
my face is nothing new to set eyes on.
Maybe,
I

am the most handsome
of all thy sons.
Give them,
with gladness grown mouldy,
a quick death of time,
that there be children grown duly older,
boys—fathers,

girls—with child.
 And let the newborn grow
 the Magi's grey inquisitive hairs,
 and they will come—
 and will christen their children, I know,
 with the names of my verse.

Translated by Herbert Marshall.

TRANSLATOR'S FOOTNOTES

1. It is typical of Mayakovsky that he often introduces actual names, addresses and other factual details into his poems. Lyuda and Olya are the names of his two sisters.
2. Borshch, a popular Russian and Ukrainian soup made of beetroot, cabbage, meat, etc.
3. Zarathustra or Zoroaster, founder of Persian religion. Adopted by Nietzsche in his philosophical work "THUS SPAKE ZARATHUSTRA."
4. General Gallifet was a French General who took savage reprisals against the revolutionaries of the Paris Commune.
5. Mamai, a Tartar Khan who, according to legend, feasted while sitting on a throne made of the bodies of his enemies.
6. Azev, an agent-provocateur, who, while acting as a leading terrorist, simultaneously betrayed many of his comrades to the Tsarist police.

"I"

(1912)

On the pavement
 of my trampled soul
 the soles of madmen
 stamp the prints of rude, crude words.
 Where cities
 hang
 and in the noose of clouds
 the towers'
 crooked spires
 congeal—
 I go
 and solitary weep
 that cross-roads
 crucify
 policemen.

Translated by George Reavey.

BROTHER WRITERS
(1915)

It seems, I shall never grow accustomed
to sitting in the "Bristol,"
drinking tea,
lying by the line—
I shall upset the glasses,
clamber on the table
"Listen
literary brothers !
You sit,
eyes drowning in tea,
your velvet elbows worn with scribbling.
Raise your eyes from the unemptied glasses !
Disentangle your ears from those shaggy locks !
Darlings,
what wedded you to words,
you who sit glued
to walls
and wall-paper ?
Do you know that
Francois Villon,
when he finished writing,
did his job of plundering ?
And you,
who quake at the sight of a penknife,
boast yourselves guardians of a splendid age.
What have you to write about to-day ?
Any solicitor's assistant finds
life
a hundred times more interesting.
Gentlemen poets,
have you not tired
of pages,
palaces,
love
and lilac blooms ?
If such as you
are the creators,
then I spit upon all art.
I'd rather open a shop,

or go on the Stock Exchange
 and bulge my sides with fat wallets.
 In a tavern rear
 I'll spew up my soul
 in a drunken song.
 Will the blow tell,
 cleave through your sheaves of hair ?
 But you've only one idea
 under that mop of hair :
 to comb ! And why ?
 For a while, it's not worth the labour
 and to be eternally
 combed
 is impossible."

Translated by George Reavey.

(From *Soviet Literature*. An Anthology edited by
 G. Reavey and Marc Slonim. Wishart, 1933).

THE REVOLUTIONARY

OUR MARCH

(1917)

Beat on the street the march of rebellion,
 sweeping over the heads of the proud ;
 we, the flood of a second deluge,
 shall wash the world like a bursting cloud.

Days are a bright steed.
 Years drag glum.
 Our great god is Speed !
 Our heart a bellowing drum !

What is richer than our colours ?
 Can we be caught by the bullet's sting ?
 For rifles and bayonets we have ballads.
 Our gold is our voices' ring !

Green meadows grow.
 Days burst by.
 Rainbow, curve your bow !
 Hurrying horses, fly !

See, heaven above us is bored with the stars !
 But without its help our songs will thrive.
 Hey, you, Great Bear, demand there
 we be lifted to heaven alive !

Sing ! Drink sweet !
 Our veins flow Spring !
 Beat, heart, beat !
 Breast of brass, ring !

Translated by Joseph Freeman.

(From "Voices of October" by J. Freeman, J. Kunitz,
 L. Lozowick. Published by Vanguard Press, 1930).

DECREE TO THE ARMY OF ART

(1918)

They brag, the old men's brigades,
 Of the same old wearisome goals,
 Comrades,
 To the barricades !
 Barricades of hearts and souls.
 He alone is a communist true
 Who burns the bridge for retreat,
 Stop marching slowly, Futurists,
 Into the future—leap !
 Engines are easy to build,
 Wind the wheels and they go—
 But hurl your song like a bomb,
 There's a railway depot to blow !
 Pile up sound on sound,
 March on
 With whistle and song ;
 Loud ringing letters abound
 To roll
 Under
 Your tongue.
 Pants creased like a feather's edge——
 That's the easy Officer's way ;
 All the Soviets won't budge the troops

Unless the musicians play.
 Drag pianos into the street,
 Let drums rend the air asunder,
 Whether drums or pianos beat,
 Let tumult be,
 Let thunder !
 What good to slave in a shop,
 To soil your face and growl.
 Why stare at the joy
 Of others,
 Flapping your eyes like an owl ?
 Enough of pennywise talk—
 Wipe the old from the heart who dares.
 The streets shall be our brushes,
 Our palettes shall be the squares.
 The thousand-paged Book of Time
 Revolution's songs shall know :
 Into the streets, Futurists,
 Drummers and poets, go !

Translated by Joseph Freeman and Leon Talmey.

(Reprinted from "The Nation").

"LEFT MARCH"

For the Red Marines : 1918

Rally the ranks into a march !
 Now's no time to quibble or browse there,
 Silence, you orators !
 You
 have the floor,
 Comrade Mauser.
 Enough of living by laws
 that Adam and Eve have left.
 Hustle old history's horse.
 LEFT !
 LEFT !
 LEFT !

Ahoy, blue jackets !
 Cleave skywards !
 Beyond the oceans !
 Unless
 your battleships on the roads
 blunted their keels' fighting keenness !
 Baring the teeth of his crown,
 let the lion of Britain whine,¹ gale-heft.
 The Commune can never go down.
 LEFT !
 LEFT !
 LEFT !

There—
 beyond sorrow's seas,
 sunlit lands uncharted.
 Beyond hunger,
 beyond plague's dark peaks,
 marching of millions imprint !
 Let armies of hirelings ambush us,
 streaming cold steel through every rift,
 L'Entente can't conquer the Russians,
 LEFT !
 LEFT !
 LEFT !

Does the eye of the eagle fade ?
 Shall we stare back to the old ?
 Proletarian fingers
 grip tighter
 the throat of the world :
 Chests out ! Shoulders straight !
 Stick to the sky red flags adrift !
 Who is marching there with the right ?
 LEFT !
 LEFT !
 LEFT !

Translated by Herbert Marshall.

¹ I would emphasize this was written at the time when British (and other interventionary armies were attacking the young Soviet State. Past history now ! H.M.

MYSTERY-BOUFFE

An Heroic, Epic and Satiric Representation of our Epoch 1918
(Revised 1920 and 1921)

A deluge destroys the earth. Representatives of the Clean (Bourgeois) and and of the Unclean (Proletariat) find a refuge at the North Pole, where they build themselves an ark in which to seek safety. After being twice duped by the Clean, the Unclean revolt and throw their opponents overboard. They then visit Hell and triumph over it, leaving it to harbour the Clean. They visit the Paradise of the Gospels and desert it contemptuously as a hungry, joyless spot. The Unclean then return to earth, repair by their own efforts the chaos prevailing after the Great War and at last enter into the Promised Land, the Communist paradise of material plenty on earth.

This is Act VI, Scene 2. (Second Variant, 1921) :

The doors fly open and the city is disclosed. But what a city ! The wide-open frames of transparent factories and apartment houses tower up to the sky. Trains of railway cars, tram cars and automobiles stand wrapped in rainbows. . . . In the midst of the city is a garden of stars and moons, surmounted by the shining crown of the sun. From the show windows the best goods emerge, and headed by the Sickle and the Hammer, advance to the gate to offer Bread and Salt.¹ Exclamations burst forth from the dumb ranks of the Unclean who are huddled together.

Unclean : Aaaaah-ah !

Things : Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! ha ! ha !

Farm Hand : Who are you ?

And whose ?

Things : Why whose ?

Farm Hand : What is your master's name.

Things : No master us can claim.

No man's are we.

Each is a delegate.

The Sickle and the Hammer
greet you—

The emblems of our Socialist State.

Farm Hand : But for whom is the Bread ?

The Salt ?

The Sugar Loaf ?

Do you come to greet your Governor ?

¹ Ancient Russian emblems of hospitality.

Things : No !

You !

All is yours !

Laundress : Don't lie !

We are not babes or blind.

It must be,

they sell you on the sly.

It must be,

a horde of speculators

hide behind.

Things : There are no speculators !

Look !

Servant : I understand the way.

They'll store you in the Empeekay,¹ and in a year they'll deal you out in spoonfuls.

Things : In no place do they store

us. Each of you may take

a peck,

and more.

Fisherman : We must be asleep

and dream of this.

Seamstress : Once

I sat

in the third gallery.

And on the stage

I saw a ball

" La Traviata."

They dined

and wined.

I left the hall—

And then life outside seemed so bitter :

Dirt,

Mire.

Things : But no such rare delight

will always meet your sight !

This is the earth.

Blacksmith : Stop all this foolery !

Is this the earth :

The earth is dirt,

is night and dearth.

On earth you work and think to eat your mouthful,
when a fat man comes and filches every morsel.

¹ MPK—Local Committee for Food Supplies.

Laundress : (pointing at the Bread)

It calls,
But it
no doubt,
will bite.
A 100,000 rubles I will bet you,
a 100,000 teeth await you
for every ovenful of that Bread.

Loco Engineer : (pointing to the Machines)

They too !
They come to us !
They creep like any mouse.
Those soft-stepping Machines have clawed us all like cats !
For your sharp teeth the workmen were the rats !

Machines : Forgive us, workmen !

Workmen forgive,
It was you that wrought us,
assembled us,
founded us.
But they seized us,
enslaved us—
“ Run, Machines, run !
cease not, you steel slaves,
Rest not, nor falter ! ” —
They bade us bear the fat men on our tires.
They bade us work for them in factories.
Shaft upon shaft,
with belts of leather,
year after year—
They made us tear
with flywheels of steel
your bodies frail.
Shout, you motors !
Great is our glee !
Crushed are the fat men ;
now we are free.
Roar in the factories, moving the wheels.
Rush over the rails, coursing the fields.
Now the world makes holiday ;
Now the night shines as the day.
Now until the end of time
Yours are we, workmen.

Things : We too, we too, the tools of your trades ;
 Hammers and Needles, Saws, Tongs and Spades.
 When daylight had scarcely vanished the dark,
 bending beneath us, you went to your work.
 Heeding no longer the bosses' commands
 all things we fashion and forge for your hands.
 To you,
 whose backs broke beneath us—
 To you we come and beg you greet us
 in the wide smithy of this Paradise of Joy.
 Raise now the Hammer, and wield it as a toy.

Edibles : And we, all things that man can drink and eat—
 we caused the workers trouble and defeat.
 Without this Bread no labourer has might,
 nor without Sugar sweetness and delight.
 By man's hard toil we scarce were earned.
 Our price increased a millionfold :
 Barking like dogs, we spurned
 your hungry gaze from windows of the shop.
 But of the idle parasites you made an end !
 And Bread is now both free and sweet.
 All that you eyed with gnashing of your teeth,
 All now is yours: seize it and eat !

Machines, Things and Edibles (in chorus) :

Take what is yours !
 Take !
 Go !
 All wherewith to work.
 All that man can eat.
 Go and take.
 Go, conquerors !

Blacksmith : Of course we must present
 an order for supplies.
 But we have none to show.
 We're straight from Paradise,
 Which we reached from Hell below.

Things : No orders are required.
 No such things are desired.

Farm Hands : Our feet aren't sharper than a hoe—
 We cannot blunt them now.
 Come brothers let us try.
 Now let us eat or die !

(*The Unclean advance. The Farm Hand touches the earth.*)

Farm Hand : It is the earth.

It is

our native motherland.

All : Now we must sing,

Must shout,

Must raise a prayer

to the air.

Baker (to Carpenter) : It's sugar,

I licked it.

Carpenter : Well !

Baker : Sweet as sweet.

Sec. Voices : Now we'll be jolly beyond compare !

Farm Hand : (*growing tipsy*)

Comrade Things,

Just let me say a word to you.

To suffer woe we need

no longer fear.

Now we will manufacture you,

and you our mouths will feed.

And if the boss some plot contrive,

we will not let him go alive !

It's we that now begin to live.

All : To live ! To live !

Merchant : (*elbowing way through crowd, jumps out indignantly*) :

What's that you say !

Be moderate.

A concessionaire deserves his pay

and rebate !

Blacksmith : Be off with you.

Your work is over.

You've earned enough

for your babies' milk.

We've studied all your skill,

and now we've learned it well—

So now you may retire.¹

(*The Merchant is thrown out headlong. The Unclean survey the Things greedily.*)

¹ A reference to Lenin's advocacy of the New Economic Policy. "We must learn from the bourgeois how to do business."

Farm Hand : I'd like to take a Saw.

My arms are slack

for lack

of work. I'm young you see !

Saw : Take me !

Seamstress : I'd like a needle. I can handle you.

My fingers itch.

Carpenter : Give me a Hammer !

Hammer : Take me and dandle me.

(The Unclean, the Things and the Machines form a ring around the sunny garden.)

Loco Engineer (to the Machines) : I'd like to make you go.

You won't begin to rush and bellow ?

Machines : No never !

Just press the lever !

(The Loco Engineer presses the lever. The wheels begin to turn. The Unclean gaze with delight and amazement.)

Loco Engineer : Never have I seen such a world.

Whence comes it ?

It is not the earth—

It is a glowing comet that appears
with a train of railway cars.

Why did we low
like oxen at the plow ?

We waited,
waited, waited years,
and never even cast our eyes
at the blessing that appears
here at our side.

And why do men seek pleasure
by visiting museums ?

Around them stand rich treasures upon treasures.

Is that the sky or but a strip of calico ?

If our hands have made it so,
then what door is

not open wide before us ?

We are the architects of earths,
the planets' decorators ;

We are the wonder makers.

The sunbeams we shall tie
in radiant brooms, and sweep
the clouds from the sky
with electricity.

We shall make honey-sweet the rivers of the world.

The streets of earth we'll pave with radiant stars.

Dig! Gouge! Saw! Bore!

All shout "Hurrah!"

Hurrah for all
the things that are.

To-day these are but doors of theatre properties,
to-morrow their poor stuff
will be replaced by firm realities.

We know that well,

we trust in it,
and now we tell
the news to you.

Come to us from the hall!

Come hither one and all.

Come hither, Actor, Poet, Director.

(All spectators mount the stage.)

All: (in chorus) Sun-worshippers in the fair church
of this our Paradise on earth,
now we will show you how well we can sing.
Come take your stand in our choral band!
Let the psalms of the future ring.

(The Compromiser suddenly bobs up and gazes with astonishment at the Commune. Understanding what is going on, he politely removes his hat.)

Compromiser: No.

An energetic man is out of place in heaven.

Those fasting mugs don't please me. No,

Our destiny is socialism.

I always told you so.

(To Unclean) Comrades, you must not so discordantly
with jangling voices shout and cry.
Singing requires sweet harmony.

(He goes to one side and softly directs with his hand. The Blacksmith leads him away courteously.)

*Unclean : (sing)*¹

With workers' millions now we've crushed
the ancient prison's ghastly power.
The brand of bondage yields to us ;
the world is free this day and hour.
As dust oppression flies away ;
Our chains are snapped and thrown aside.
The fairy tale is true to-day.
The Commune's door stands open wide.

SOUND of Victory the call.
Sing, men of all the earth.
With the International
Behold mankind's new birth.

We waited not for Heaven's salvation ;
Nor God nor Devil plead our cause.
In arms we fought with every nation,
gained power for the working class.
In one Commune the world we've blended ;
the workers' ring enfolds all lands.
Now come and try to snatch our splendid,
majestic power from our hands.

(repeat chorus)

All memory of the past shall perish ;
the bourgeois rule is crushed and lost.
The earth we hold and aye shall cherish.
We, soldiers of the toilers' host,
from fields and factories ascend,
come from the towns both great and small.
The world is ours from end to end ;
we who were naught, to-day are all.

(repeat chorus)

(From the translation by George R. Noyes and Alex Kaun)

Published in *Masterpieces of the Russian Drama*, selected and edited by G. R. Noyes, Prof. of Slavonic Languages in Univ. of California, Appleton & Co., 1933.

¹ This song is a paraphrase of *The International*.

MAYAKOVSKY ABROAD

PARIS

(1922-3)

(A little chat with the Eiffel Tower)

By thousands of tyres outworn.

By millions of feet out-trod.

I furrow Paris—

so terribly alone,

it's terrible—not a soul,

terrible—nobody.

Around me—

autos fantastise a dance,

around me—

whistling water, fountain-poured

from beastfish snouts—

still left from Louis Quinze.

I enter

La Place de la Concorde.

I wait,

till upraising its fretted peak,

tired from the trailing houses eyeing,

coming to meet me—

a bolshevik—

Eiffel rears from the clouds defiant.

S-s-s-sh . . .

tower,

stalk quietly !

That moon's a guillotine leer.

(I lowered to a whisper)

Listen to me

(and murmured

buzzzzzz

in her

radio-ear.)

I've agitated all things made and built.

We only want to know—

if you are agreed,

tower—

do you want to head a revolt ?

Tower—



MAYAKOVSKY ABROAD.

Caricature by the Kukryniksi (Kuprianov, Krylov and Sokolov).

if so
we elect you to lead !
It's not for you—
model genius of machines—
here
to pine away from Apollinairic verse.
No place
for you—
this place of degradations.
This Paris of prostitutes,
poets,
bourse.
The Metro's agreed,
the Metro's with us—
they'll spit out
from riveted tunnels
the crowd—
and wipe and scour
from their walls
with blood
placards-de-luxe of perfumes and powders.
they're convinced—
why should they stream and clatter
with first-class cars for the rich.
They're not rabble !
They're convinced :
our adverts
suit them better,
simple posters
and placards of struggle.
Tower—
don't fear the streets !
Or else
if the streets won't release the Metro—
The road-beds are welded by rails.
I'll raise up the rails to revolt.
You're afraid ?
Tractors in flocks will defend you.
Still afraid ?
To our aid will come Rive-Gauche.
Don't be afraid !
I'll persuade the bridges too.
It's not so easy

to swim across !
The bridges,
maddened by the traffic hell,
will rise from the river banks of Paris.
At the very first call
all bridges will rebel—
and dash passers-by on their buttressed piers
Every thing uprears.
Things are beyond endurance.
In fifteen
maybe twenty years,
strength dissolves,
steel flabbies,
and one of these nights
things
will go
to Montmartre
and sell themselves.
Come, tower,
to us !
There—
you're more needed.
Steel-shining,
smoke-piercing,
we'll meet you.
Come to us.
You'll be more tenderly greeted
than our first love of loves.
Come to Moscow !
Moscow
is spacious.
Everyone
will have you in their street !
Everyone
will cherish you.
A hundred times a day or so
we'll clean your steel and copper like the sun.
Let that city of yours,
Paris of dandies and dudes,
Paris of yap-yawning boulevards,
let it end the same, in old Boulogne woods,
and museums, an all-in cemetery Louvre.
March forward

those four mighty paws endowed
and clamped by the blue-prints of Eiffel,
In our broad sky let your tall brow be radioed,
that even our red stars will get an eyeful !
Decide, tower—
all around you revolts are
shattering from head to foot old Paris !
Come to us !
to US, to the U.S.S.R. !
Come on. Let's go—
I'll
get you a visa !

Translated by Herbert Marshall.



*Caricature of G. F. GNESIN, THE COMPOSER,
drawn by Mayakovsky (1915).*

"HOMEWARDS"

(1925—*On the Atlantic Ocean*)

My thoughts go homewards, to all I hold dear,
 feelings
 deeper than the sea.

He,
 who is always calm and clear—
 seems
 simply stupid
 to me.

Of all cabins
 mine is the worst cabin—
 all night overhead
 feet hammer and pound.

All night,
 the ceiling's quiet disturbing,
 a dance is heard,
 the moaning motif sounds :

" Marcheta,
 Marcheta,
 I love you Marcheta,
 Oh love me Marcheta
 please do."

And why
 should Marcheta love me, d'you think ?
 I haven't even
 a franc to bestow.

And Marcheta
 (at the tiniest wink)
 for 100 francs
 would take me to her cabin below.
 Not much money—

live if just for mere chic—
 No,
 intelligent,
 raising a whirlwind of dust
 or worse,
 you'll palm off on her
 a sewing machine,

that sews,
 stitch by stitch,
 the silk of your verse.
 Proletarians
 come to communism
 from the depths beneath—
 the depths of mines,
 sickles,
 and factories.
 I
 hurl myself into communism
 from the heights of poetry above,
 because without it,
 for me,
 there is no love.
 It's all the same—
 whether I banished myself
 or was sent to Mum again—
 steel words rust,
 blackens copper bass.
 Why is it,
 under foreign rain,
 I get wet,
 and rot
 and rust?
 Here I lie,
 travelling over the sea,
 I feel
 I'm a Soviet factory,
 manufacturing happiness.
 I don't want to be
 a wayside flower,
 plucked after work
 in an idle hour.
 I want GosPlan
 to sweat in debate
 assigning my output
 as part of the State.
 I want
 Commissar Time
 to hover ever
 over my thoughts
 with a decree to deliver.

I want,
 as a high-grade specialist in art
 to receive the love
 that's the due of my heart.
 I want,
 at the shift's end,
 the Factory Committee
 to shut my lips
 with a padlock and key.
 I want the pen
 to equal the gun,
 to be listed
 with iron
 in industry.
 And the PolitBureau's agenda :
 Item 1,
 to be Stalin's Report on
 " The Output of Poetry " :
 " It's like this . . .
 and that . . .
 out of burrows
 the working class
 has climbed right up
 to the top of the tree :
 In the Union Republics
 the pre-war level's
 been far surpassed
 in the understanding
 of poetry "

Translated by Herbert Marshall.

MY SOVIET PASSPORT

(1929)

I'd tear
 like a wolf
 at bureaucracy.
 For mandates
 my respect's but the slightest.

To the devil himself
I'd chuck without mercy
every red-taped paper.
But this . . .
Down the long front
of coupés and cabins
File the officials
politely.
They gather up passports
and I give in
My own vermilion booklet.
For one kind of passport—
smiling lips part
For others—
an attitude scornful.
They take
with respect, for instance,
the passport
from a sleeping-car
English Lionel.
The good fellow's eyes
almost slip like pips
when,
bowing as low as men can,
they take,
as if they were taking a tip,
the passport
from an American.
At the Polish,
they dolefully blink and wheeze
in dumb
police elephantism—
where are they from,
and what are these
geographical novelties ?
And without a turn
of their cabbage heads,
their feelings
hidden in lower regions,
they take without blinking,
the passports from Swedes
and various
old Norwegians.

Then sudden
as if their mouths were
quake
those gentlemen almost
whine
Those very official gentlemen
take
that red-skinned passport
of mine.
Take—
like a bomb
take—like a hedgehog,
like a razor
double-edge stropped,
take
like a rattlesnake
huge and long
with at least
20 fangs
poison-tipped.
The porter's eyes
give a significant flick
(I'll carry your baggage
for nix,
mon ami . . .)
The gendarmes enquiringly
look at the tec,
the tec,—
at the gendarmerie.
With what delight
that gendarme caste
would have me
strung-up and whipped raw
because I hold
in my hands
hammered-fast
sickle-clasped
my red Soviet passport.
I'd tear
like a wolf
at bureaucracy.
For mandates
my respect's but the slightest.

To the devil himself
 I'd chuck
 without mercy
 every red-taped paper.
 But this . . .
 I pull out
 of my wide trouser-pockets
 duplicate
 of a priceless cargo.
 You now :
 read this
 and envy,
 I'm a citizen
 of the Soviet Socialist Union !

Translated by Herbert Marshall.

THE SATIRIST

IN RE CONFERENCES¹

(1922)

This was the first poem by Mayakovsky to be published in a Soviet national newspaper. It appeared in *Izvestia* 5th March, 1922. On the 6th March at a Conference of the Communist Fraction of the All-Union Congress of Metalworkers, Lenin mentioned it in his speech. He said : " Yesterday, quite by chance, I read in *Izvestia* a poem by Mayakovsky. I don't count myself among the admirers of his poetic talent, although I frankly admit my incompetence in that sphere. But it is a long time since I experienced such pleasure from the political and administrative standpoint. In this poem he laughs at conferences and makes fun of Communists because they are always in meetings and conferences. I don't know about the poetry but as for the politics, I can vouch for it that he is absolutely right."

No sooner the night turns into dawn
 than everyone whose job it is,
 goes to the " Firm "
 to the " Co.,"
 to the " Inc.,"
 to the " Corp.,"
 they all disappear into offices.

¹ This poem is almost impossible to translate because of the play on well-known and numerous abbreviations used in Russian. However, we in war-time are being flooded with similar things and can appreciate this poem more than was possible previously.

Paper business pours like a torrent,
 no sooner you get into those offices.
 Pick out from a hundred—
 the most important !—
 employees disappear into conferences.

Then I appear and ask :

 " To whom can I refer ?

Been here since once upon a time."

" Comrade Ivan Ivanitch have¹ gone to confer
 with the People's Commissar of Teetotal Wine."
 Crippled by countless stairs.

 Light barely blinks.

Again :

 " Asks you to come back in an hour or so.

In conference :—

 re the purchase of inks
 for the All-In Co-Op. Corp & Co."

In an hour—

 Not a clerk,

 not an office boy appears . . .

bare !

Everyone up to 22 years

is at the Komsomol² conference upstairs.

Night is falling.

 I still climb on

to the highest floor of my temporary home.

" Has Comrade Ivan Ivanitch come in ? "

" Still in conference

 with the A-B-C-D-E-F-G-Com."

Into that conference,

 I burst like a lava,

with savage oaths the path is strewn.

And see :

 people are sitting there in halves.

Heavens above !

 Where've their other halves gone ?

" Slaughtered !

 Murdered ! "

Running like mad I shout.

¹ Mayakovsky deliberately uses the plural.

² Young Communist League.

At such a picture I go out of my mind.
 Then I hear the calmest of clerks point out :
 " They're in *two* conferences at the very same time."
 Twenty conferences
 we have to attend to
 every day—
 and more to spare.
 So we're forced to split ourselves in two !
 Here to the waist,
 and the rest—
 over there.

Can't sleep for suspense.
 I meet the dawn with frenzied senses.
 " Oh for just
 one
 more conference
 regarding the eradication of all conferences ! "

Translated by Herbert Marshall.

LINES ABOUT DIFFERENCES IN TASTE

(1929)

Horse,
 having glanced at a camel,
 exclaimed :
 " What an extraordinary
 bastardised
 horse ! "
 Camel
 (for his part)
 claimed : " You're not a horse ;
 You're nothing else
 but an undersized camel."

And no one but
 God
 in the starry spaces
 knew
 that the two
 were of different species.

Translated by Alan Moray Williams.

(Reprinted from " Lilliput.")

VERSE FOR CHILDREN

WHAT IS GOOD AND WHAT IS BAD

(1925)

Tiny toddler told his Dad :
" I am puzzled so !
What is good and what is *bad* ?
Answer if you know ! "
Secrets I will always shun—
Nothing could be worse !
All that Papa told his son
I have put in verse.

If the wind tears down the roofs,
If the heavens spout,
That is bad—why, even goofs
Will not venture out.
Sun has conquered rain and cold,
Sun shines over all—
That is good for young and old,
Good for big and small.

If the boy is black as pitch,
If his face has dirt on,
Then his skin is bound to itch—
And that is bad for certain.
If the boy likes soap and water,
Toothpaste, brush and comb,
Then he's very good and ought to
Be a pet at home.

Some boys bully, bite and hit
Boys but half their size.
Boys like this I can't permit
Verse to advertise.
Other boys will never strike
Smaller boys. That's good !
Boys like this we're bound to like—
That is understood.

If the boy destroys and tears
Picture books and toys,
Each October-child¹ declares :
“ What a bad, bad boy ! ”
If his eyes to books are glued,
If he's never shirking,
Then the boy is very good,
For he's fond of working.

This boy met a crow and scampered
In a dreadful funk.
Coward ! He is sorely hampered
Through his lack of spunk.
Others would not be afraid to
Tackle birds of prey.
Good ! Such spunk's a mighty aid to
Boys on life's long way.

Some boys' shirts are black as ovens,
Yet the boys seem glad.
People call them dirty slovens.
Don't you think they're bad ?
This boy's shoes are always shiny
Just as shoes should be.
Though the boy is very tiny,
He is good, you see.

All must grow from small to big—
Nothing ought to balk us.
Boys are bound to grow up pigs
If the boys are porkers.
Tiny toddler understood.
Tiny told his dad :
“ I will always do what's *good*,
Never what is *bad*.”

Translated by Paddy Breslin.

¹ October-child—an organization for very young Soviet children.

THE POET AND POETRY

JUBILEE

(1924)

Note by Herbert Marshall

Here is the first translation in English of a well-known poem written by Mayakovsky on the occasion of a Jubilee of the great classic Russian poet Pushkin. As Mayakovsky had so vigorously and often bitingly attacked the old world, an impression had arisen that he condemned all that the old world had produced. This of course was nonsense, and he refuted it in many of his poems and lectures. Here we see it dealt with directly in relation to Pushkin. With a typical Mayakovsky touch, he goes up to the statue of Pushkin, which stands in what was then Tverskaya Square (now named "Pushkin Square"), and boldly introduces himself and lifts Pushkin off his pedestal. This very action is in itself symbolic of his whole attitude throughout the poem: that the classics have been placed on pedestals and covered with "anthologian lacquer"; that professorial Pushkinists have made Pushkin into a mummy, and one can feel the great desire of Mayakovsky to meet with someone his own size—

" Maybe
 I'm the only one
 that's really sorry,
 Alexander,
 that you're not here alive with us to-day."

His judgments of many contemporary poets in this poem may seem harsh; but time has proved their accuracy. Geniuses are always rare, and because of that very fact alone, they find greater problems to solve and greater work to do; and the wonder of great artists is in the great works of art they produce in solving their problems—as an oyster produces pearls. Here in this poem, with his customary vigour, Mayakovsky hits out, right and left, at slander, incompetence, obscurantism, and his own personal difficulties, and ends up with his great affirmation of life.

JUBILEE

(Written on the 125th anniversary of the birth of PUSHKIN)

Alexander Sergeyevitch

allow me to introduce *Mayakovsky*.

Give me your hand !

Here on my chest,
listen !

No longer beats but growls and groans.

This meek little lion cub

leaves me disquieted.

I never knew

there were so many

thousand tons

in my

shamefully light-headed head.

I'll lift you down.

Surprised no doubt at my nerve ?

Embarrassed ?

Painful ?

Forgive me

old man.

I've got—

yes, and so have you—

eternity in reserve.

To us what's the loss of an hour's span ?

As if on the water—

let's glide along chattering.

Free

and unfettered—

as if it were spring !

See,

that young moon's beauty's

so shattering,

to leave her

unchaperoned's

too risky a thing !

From love

and from posters

I'm relieved now.

And see—

the Red & White Star Line

gets under weigh

with heaps

of various visas.

I like to be with you—

having a drink.

How that Muse leads you

deftly

by the tongue.

Now who was it said—

Your Olga, I think,—

No—

In Onegin's letter to Tatyana.¹

How does it run ?

“ So to say,

your husband is a fool

beyond endurance.

I love you,

and you shall be mine for aye.

Give me each morning an assurance

that I shall meet with you that day.”

Anything can happen :

and under the window eaves,

a letter—

and a quiver of nervous jelly there.

Ah,

but when one cannot even grieve

that, Alexander Sergeyitch, is much harder to bear.

Hey you, Mayakovsky !

Lighthouse² to the south.

Your heart

is labouring with rhymes

so rich,

and now—

love has come to nowt,

my dear Vladim Vladimich.³

That name won't know old age

nor leisure !

¹ Here Mayakovsky paraphrases a verse from Pushkin's greatest poetical work : *Eugene Onegin* ; therefore to give the same effect I have paraphrased an English translation of the same verse—that by Prof. Oliver Elton.

² “ Mayak ” in Russian means “ Lighthouse.”

³ Mayakovsky's Christian name and patronymic was Vladimir Vladimirovich.

We'll ask
 that he be shifted
 somewhere nearer Z !
 There's Nekrasov,¹
 Kolya,
 he's not so bad
 at cards,
 at poetry
 and even in his looks.
 D'you know him ?
 He's a decent peasant lad.
 We'll let him stay
 in our good books.
 And contemporaries ?
 Unchecked I'd swop half a gross of . . .
 My jaws
 from yawning
 crack and gape—
 Rodov,
 Dorogoichenko,
 Kirillov,
 Gerasimov²
 What
 a monotonous landscape.
 Yessenin ?³
 A clown on a leash to bore us.
 Laughable !
 A cow
 kid-glove encumbered.
 You hear him once . . .
 sure he's from the chorus !
 A balalaika strummer !
 A poet must be master
 in life also.
 We're strong,
 like spirit from Poltava vats.

¹ N. A. Nekrasov (1821-77), along with Pushkin and Lermontov, the greatest of Russian poets—he called his muse “The muse of revenge and of grief.” It was through his works that generations of young Russians learned to hate oppression, to abominate autocracy, to understand the common people and to sympathise with the toiler.

² Poets contemporary to Mayakovsky ; most of them are now forgotten.

³ Sergei Yessenin (1895-1925), the last of the old village poets. Lost in the cabarets of cities but always nostalgically looking back to the old village.

Well, what about Bezimensky ? ¹

Ah, so, so.

Not so bad . . .

coffee ersatz.

We have

Kolka Aseyev, ²

it's true.

He can.

He's got a grip

like me.

But look how much

he has to get through.

She's tiny,

but a family.

If you'd have been alive—

you'd be *LEF's* ³ co-editor.

I could entrust

agit-posters

to one so virile.

Just show you once—

you'd see what it's for.

You could do it—

you've got a very good style.

I'd have given you a brush

and rough cambric,

and you could advertise

our Soviet Stores.

(I'd even

have lisped iambics

to be a good pal

of yours.)

But to-day

iambic-lisping

you can't put over.

Now our pens

are bayonets,

and our teeth,

steel-tough,

¹ Alexander Bezimensky (1898-), at one time a promising second to Mayakovsky—but has not lived up to his promise yet.

² Nikolai Aseyev (1898-), Mayakovsky's greatest poet-friend, who has recently completed a wonderful biographical poem on the life of Mayakovsky—"Mayakovsky Emerges" (see p. 150).

³ The journal edited by Mayakovsky.

⁴ A provocateur who shot and mortally wounded Pushkin in a duel that had been deliberately engineered.

THE POET OF LIFE

A MOST EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURE

(1920)

What happened to Me, Vladimir Mayakovsky, at the Rumyantsev Summerhouse, Mount Akula, Pushkino, on the Yaroslav Railway.

The sunset fired a hundred suns,
summer had rolled into July,
heat stretched and purred,
heat hugged the sky—
and it was in the country this occurred.
The hill, called Mount Akula, hunched its back
and lifted high
Pushkino's huts and winding streets.
The bark roofs of the village warped
the hill, and bowed with heat.
Now, off beyond the village lay
a yawning hole,
and every day
the sun dropped down into that hole,
and slowly and most certainly
upon the morrow its bright head
would pop out of that hole
as red
as ever, in the self-same way.
And this thing happened every day.
So I got sore,
Yes, I was vexed
It maddened me always to know
just what would happen next.
And once, thoroughly sick of it,
I shouted in the sun's red face :
"Climb down !
Forget your lousy pit !"
I cried, like that, right at the sun :
"You good-for-nothing ! You've a cushioned place



Illustration to "A MOST EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURE," by David Burluk.

up in the clouds, and here I sit,
not knowing if it's Spring or Fall,
drawing posters, and that's all ! ”
I yelled up at the sun :
“ You wait !
Listen to me, you brazen-eyed,
instead of setting as you do,
why don't you come around,” I cried,
“ and have a glass of tea
with me ? ”

What have I done !
Now I am lost !
Here comes the sun,
with sprawling rays out-thrust,
clambering down across the field at me.
Pretending I'm not scared,
I beat a retreat.
His eyes are in the garden now.
Filling
the windows,
filling doors and cracks,
the burly sun walked in,
just so—dropped in,
and having got his breath,
spoke in a bass voice with a brazen din :
“ I have to hold my fires in check
the first time since creation.
You invited me ?
Then, poet, get the tea !
And don't forget the jam.”
And though I wept with heat and dripped
a flood of perspiration,
I got the samovar.
“ Well, have a seat,
Comrade luminary.”
It must have been the devil made me shout
my impudence at the sun.
I was put out—
and sat on the chair's very edge :
afraid of what was going to happen next.
But from the sun
a strange light flowed—

he didn't seem so vexed—
and I, forgetting my embarrassment,
no longer scary,
sat—
talking to the luminary !
I chat
of this
and that,
and soon,
with open friendship
pat him on the back.
And the sun
says—not to be outdone :
“ Well, comrade, I declare,
we are a pair !
let's go !
Poet, let's sing,
and shout to scare
the drabness of the world,
I'll pour out light,
you'll do no worse
in pouring forth your verse.”
Then the sun loosed his shot,
shattered night's shadows,
banished the whole black lot.
Rays and words,
shine for all your worth !
And when the sun gets tired,
and night, the stupid sleepy-head,
wants to doze off,
suddenly I am fired
with zeal, and shine for all I'm worth—
and day roars out again.
Always to shine,
and everywhere to shine,
and, to the very last,
to shine,—
thus runs
my motto,
and the sun's.

Translated by Babette Deutsch and Avram Yarmolinsky.

From Modern Russian Poetry, Bodley Head.

1



"We shall conquer" so said we.
 "Utopia!" said the bourgeoisie.
 "We can crush you to dust,
 but it's not worth the effort."

3



But soon that Utopia made
 him see stars.

2



At electrification his eyes bulged a bit.
 "Utopia" he said "nothing
 will come of it."

4



Just you wait, bourgeoisie.
 There'll be New York in 'Tetushakh,¹
 there'll be paradise in Shuee.¹

"THEN AND NOW," Verse and drawing for a poster, by Mayakovsky (1921)

Translated by Herbert Marshall

¹ Tiny villages in far away isolated parts of Russia.

VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN

(1924)

Dedicated to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)

It's time—I begin
 The story of Lenin.
 But not because
 sorrow
 no longer remains
 time now,
 because
 anguish's sharp complaining
 has become
 a clarified deep-pondered pain.
 Time
 again
 for Lenin's slogans whirlwind driving.
 Shall we
 shed out tears
 in a shower?
 Lenin
 is now
 the most live of all living,
 Our weapon,
 our knowledge,
 our power.

II

People—are ships.
 Dry land's no obstacle.
 Living
 the log
 of our now,
 with many
 dirty barnacles
 clinging
 tight
 to our prows.
 Safely surviving storms
 we steer

to dock
 nearer the sunshine,
 and clean ourselves
 of green
 sea-weeded beards
 and jellyfishes' pale-pink slime.
 I
 clean myself
 by Lenin,
 to cruise
 still further
 in revolution's sea.
 Yet I fear
 the lines I'm penning
 as a youngster
 fears hypocrisy.
 That head is now laurel-wreath illumined.
 I'm only anxious
 it shouldn't shroud
 the genuine
 wise
 human
 tremendous
 Lenin
 brow.
 I fear
 the mausoleum
 and official functions,
 established statute
 servility
 may clog
 with cloying unction
 Leninist
 simplicity.
 I tremble for him
 as for the apple of my eye,
 that none
 should slander
 with choc-box beauty.
 My heart's in favour—
 I'm obliged to write
 by the mandate of duty.

Paint black—
 white,
and justify
 inaction.
But if someone
 can direct
phenomena's flood
 for us,
we say—
 that's a " prophet "
we say—
 that's a " genius."
We
 make no pretentions,
don't push
 if we're not called,
return our wives' affections,
at that—
 complacent with it all.
If
 body and spirit fused,
thrusts—
 unlike us,
" a kingly mien "
 we enthuse,
" a gift of God,"
 we flabbergast.
It's said like that,—
 neither clever nor stupid.
Suspended words
 that vapourously melt.
Nothing
 can be hatched
 out of shells so vapid,
nor with hands
 nor head be felt.
How can such a yard-stick
 measure
 Lenin !
Why—
 seen by the eyes
 of each and all,—

into his door
 that "era" stepped in
 without even knocking its head
 on the lintel.
 Surely
 Lenin won't be mobbed :
 "Leader
 by the Grace of God ?"
 If he
 had been
 royal and divine,
 I wouldn't
 have spared myself
 out of rage.
 I'd have
 pit myself
 against that procession line,
 cut across the crowd
 and the funeral cortège.
 I'd
 have found
 enough curse-words
 for blasting ears,
 and before
 they could smother
 my cry
 and drown me—
 I'd have hurled
 to the heavens
 blasphemies,
 and battered
 the Kremlin
 with bombs :—
 "Down with :"
 But firm
 by the coffin
 are the steps of Dzerzhinsky ;¹
 now even
 the Cheka
 could leave its post.

¹ Chief of the Cheka, an abbreviation of the Russian—signifying "Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution."

Through a million eyes,
 through both of mine,
 tears increase—
till on red cheeks
 tear-icicles
 froze.

God's
used to praise
from official worthies.

No :
To-day
 brings a genuine anguish,
 hearts break, frozen.

We
bury
now
the most earthly,
of all
who have lived
on this earth of men.

He is earthly—
but not of those
whose nose
delves only into
their own little sty.

He grasped the earth whole,
saw that all at one go,
which lay hidden in time.

Why, he's just the same
as you
or I,

only,
 maybe,
 bigger thoughts
than ours
 furrow him
 over the eyes
and his lips
 are more mocking than ours,
 more taut.

Why, not I alone :

who am I

to begin ? :

At a movement of the lips,

no need to shout—

which of you

from your village,

your mine,

from your very skin

wouldn't step right out ?

Instinctively

avoiding

the tramway line,

as if drunk

with sorrow, I sway—

and catch my breath.

But who'd

have now

bewailed

my little dying

in mourning

for that

stupendous death ?

They march along

with banners

and without.

As if

old Nomad Russia

trekked once more.

And the Hall of Columns

trembles,

packed right out.

What's the reason ?

Why ?

What's it for ?

The telegraph's hoarse

from the funeral drum.

From flaglets'

reddened eyelids

snowtears falling.

Where's he from ?

Who is he ?

What's he done ?

This
most human of all men ?

IV

The short life
of Ulyanov¹
we've seen
as it passed
before the eyes of men.
But the long life
of Comrade Lenin
must be
written and described
again and again.
A long time ago,
about two hundred years,
for the very first time
news of Lenin appears.

V

D'you hear
the rickety Rocket's
uneven run,—
cutting through
time-ancient seams,—
the voice
of great-grandfather Stephenson's
very first engine of steam ?
His Highness
Capital,
uncrowned,
unlaurelled,
declares
village handicrafts
by power enthralled.
The city pillaged,
plundered,
ransacked,

¹ " Ulyanov " was Lenin's surname and " Lenin " a Revolutionary pseudonym.

clogging its belly
with cash,
but at the benches
skinny and hunchbacked
stood
the working class.
Already they threaten
hurling smoke-stacks
to the skies :
“ Pave with us
the way
to golden ventures,
but we'll give birth,
we'll send,
someday shall rise
a man—
scourger,
fighter,
avenger ! ”
Already
clouds and smoke
have coupled,
riding in rows
like battalions proud.
Till every sky
is doubled,
smoke
smothers the clouds.
Goods pile up
and poverty still increases.
The boss,
a bald devil in black,
totted things up
and mumbled : “ Crisis ! ”—
and hung out a sign :
“ The Sack ”
Showy sweetmeats
are blow-fly spotted,
in bulging elevators
grain is rotting,
and passing windows
of every West End way

and fire
 burn redder
 than this blood flays.
 That in this black coffee
 we pick
 and pack
 shall boil
 all pot-bellies—
 both white and black.
 Every
 trophy
 of ivory tusk
 thrust
 in their guts,
 in their hearts
 deep-thrust.
 That my blood may flow
 for the future race
 not in vain,
 come soon,
 avenger redsunfaced.
 I die,—
 the god of death
 draws nigh.
 Remember
 my death curse
 Nile,
 my Nile ! ”

VI

In the snows of Russia,
 in the swelter of tropics
 come now
 the sweat-shops
 mad skelter for profits !
 Already Ivanovno's¹
 carcase of brick

¹ An old industrial town in Russia.

is disturbed
 by the cries
 of a limerick :¹
 " Oh, you factory,
 my factory,
 yellow-eyed.
 Comes a new time for us all
 Stenka Razin cried."

VII

Grandsons questioned :
 " Tell us
 what's a capitalist ? "
 Ask our children now :
 " What is
 a policeman ? "
 For grandsons
 I write
 in one short list—
 the family portrait
 of capitalism.
 Capitalism
 in its younger years
 wasn't so bad,
 a busy fellow :
 first one to work—
 he then didn't fear
 he'd grease
 his dicky
 yellow.
 Mediæval tights
 were for him
 too tight !
 Though pants
 fit no better
 nowadays.
 Capitalism's
 spring
 budded bright

¹ The most popular Russian folk songs known as " Chastushki " are like our limericks—always being brought up to date and amplified by nameless authors.

with revolutions.

He even sang
"The Marseillaise."

It was he
conceived and invented
machines.

People,
and they—were theirs !
Throughout the universe
seen and unseen

like children
he bred
workers.

Kingdoms
and dukedoms
he gulped at a gobble
with their crowns
and eagled ornaments.

Grew fat,
like the seven lean kine
in the bible—
licking his lips.

His tongue—
parliament.

But his muscles of steel
weakened with years

And he grew fat
and inflated,

Till
in the course of time
he appears

like his great
ledgers
weighted.

Palaces edified,
churches reared.

Artists
worked for their lords'
applause.

Ceiling Rococoed,
walls Empired,
floors a la Louis XIV,
Quatorze.

and critics

will neither learn

nor listen.

" But where's the soul ? "

" Why it's—

sheer rhetoric ! "

" And where's the poetry ? "

" Mere journalism ! "

" Capitalism " 's

a word so inelegant,

how much more refined is

" Nightingale,"

But I'll come back to it

again and again.

On slogan-tipped pen

all lies impale !

About this

and that

I'll write in its hour,

but now's

no time

for a lover and his lass.

All

my ringing

poetic power

I give to you,

attacking class.

" Proletariat " 's

so crude and unsightly

to those

for whom communism's

a deadly blight.

For us

that one word

is music so mighty,

that even

the dead

it can raise to fight !

The floors

are a-quiver,

shaking the doors,

the shouts from the cellars

roar up through the floors :

He'll come
 and settle up.
 He'll confront
 you
 and yours,
 with war
 against war !
 Tears of the earth
 flow in streams,
 swamps
 of blood
 impassably congeal.
 And isolated dreamers
 strive in dreams
 to make
 impossible utopias
 real.
 But philanthropists' heads
 are conked
 like Aunt Sally.
 For the path of the millions'
 not charity's alley.
 Even
 the capitalist himself
 is impotent,
 his own
 machine
 has run amok.
 As by an earthquake
 his society's rent
 by crisis
 and strikes
 chaotic shocks.
 " Into whose pocket
 shall flow
 this gold of ours ?
 With whom shall we go ?
 Against whom take our stand ? "

The million-headed class
 furrowed its brows
 itself to understand.

The hours
 of capital
 time
 has corraled
 and its past
 is slowly
 smothered in darkness.
 Time
 gave birth
 to Brother Karl.
 Lenin's
 eldest brother
 Marx.
 Marx !
 I look up :
 greybeard in a portrait frame.
 How far
 from imaginings
 his life really passed !
 People see him
 immured
 in marbled fame,
 or as a dull old man
 in a plaster cast.
 But when the workers
 took their first tiny step
 along
 revolution's paths,
 with what
 inexpressible
 passion leapt
 that great heart
 of Marx !
 As if
 he had stood
 at each worker's bench
 and from every labour
 had calloused his hands.
 He discovered
 how surplus value
 was pinched

and caught
 red-handed
 the exploiter band.
 Where wee bodies trembled,
 with eyes downcast,
 no higher
 than the navel
 of old Boss Bellyfull,
 Marx urged :
 fight back
 with the war of class
 against
 this golden calf
 grown bull !
 It seemed to us
 in our shallows of theory
 that waves
 of accident
 threw us
 at will,
 but Marx
 revealed
 the laws of history--
 and placed the proletariat
 at the wheel
 The books of Marx
 aren't just proofs,
 made-up,
 nor dry-as-dust columns
 of letters and figures.
 Marx
 put workers on their feet--
 heads-up,
 and led them in columns
 sterner than ciphers.
 Led
 and said :
 Fight capital,
 hit back at it !
 Correct the proofs of the mind
 and its outlook.
 He'll come,
 the mighty man of practice,

and lead
 on the field of battle
 and not of books !
 When that great mind
 milled the last grain of thought,
 which his pen
 recorded—
 trembling,
 I know that Marx—
 his last battle fought—
 saw the Commune's
 red flag
 over Moscow's Kremlin.
 Days ripened,
 months grew mellow,
 years matured.
 The proletariat
 grew up
 and became adult.
 Capital's foundations,
 so firmly secured,
 quiver and crack
 with rising revolt.
 Hear the thunderous rumble
 of the oncoming years,
 the accumulating anger
 of human evolution.
 A storm of rebellion
 whose lightning sears,
 and the flames of revolt
 flare to red revolution.
 Bourgeois morals
 are pitiless,
 inhuman-hard.
 Tortured by Thiers,
 hear the suffering
 yet defying
 shadows
 of our great forbears—
 Paris Communards—
 through their Paris wall
 come crying :

"Look Brothers !

Listen Comrades !

Take to heart

this maxim :

Woe to the individualist !

Explode united.

Pound with Party,

the workers forged

into one

great
fist."

Some tell us

"We're Leaders !"—

Puppets on strings.

Behind the mask of words

see what is *said* !

Let us have leaders

great in little things—

straighter than rails,

simpler than bread.

Classes changed,

beliefs,

estates

and slang.

The earth revolved

on a Golden wheel.

From Capital

in conflict

bayonets sprang

until it became

a gigantic hedgehog

of steel.

Like a lighthouse beam

that appears

and disappears,

by the spectre of Communism

Europe was haunted.

And then in

connection with all this

in the depths of Simbirsk

was born—

an ordinary youngster—

Lenin.

with humorous remarks,
odd tales to tell . . .
It's time they started !
What's all the delay ?
Why is the Presidium
thinned out as if felled ?
Why are their eyes
redder than the loges' plush ?
What's the matter with Kalinin—
hardly stands on his feet
An accident ?
What is it ?
What's the hush ?
Can it be ?
No !
But can it be ?
The ceiling
lowered on us
with downcast wing.
We bow our heads low—
bend lower still !
The candelabras' lachrymed fires
fast sink
turn black
and quiver with a chill.
The bell gives a redundant ring
and chokes
Controlling himself
Kalinin rises.
Tears he can't brush
from beard and cheek
drop
and glisten on his front—
there's no disguising.
Thoughts heave up
to imagine it.
Blood at the temples,
a seething tide.
Yesterday
at six hours and fifty minutes
Comrade Lenin died !—

now turned away
from his old woman's gaze—
but his dirt-smeared fist
betrayed.

There were people
hard as flint—
and then

they bit their lips
till the blood ran.

Children
grew as serious as the old men,
and venerable greybeards
cried like children.

Over all the earth
the sleepless winds blow,

But nohow,
rebelling,
can one reach the conclusion,

that this coffin
 in frosty
 room-burrowed Moscow
is the son and father
 of revolution.

The End.
The End.
The End.
On whom then

to depend :
Glass— and underneath is seen . . .

That was him
they carried from
the railway room then
thro the city
he took from the Gentry.

The street,
like a raw wound opening,
groaned,
with deep pain wracked.

Here
every cobblestone
recognised Lenin

a hundred times
we'll fight
and lay in our coffins."

Then
the words of a miracle man
would resound
that we should now die—
to give him back breath,—
the dam of the streets
would be razed to the ground
and people would rush
with a song
to their death.

But wonders don't happen—
no dreams will recall him.

Just Lenin—
a coffin—
and shoulders bent.

He remained to the end
the most human of all men—
suffer
and carry
the sorrows of men.

Never yet
has been borne
by our oceans
through all ages
a cargo
so priceless,
as that coffin-red
to the House of the Unions,
floating on the backs
of sobbings and marches.

Sentries of honour
stand still at attention,
grim iron guard
of Lenin's firm forging,
and people
already
are waiting with tension,
there—
where all of Moscow's converging.

Maybe
 tearless eyes
 would see more ahead.
 Into such eyes I never glimpsed.
 Floating banners
 bow low
 as they pass
 The last salute
 is given—
 finally.
 "Farewell then, dear comrade,
 you fought to the last,
 your name in our hearts lives eternally."¹
 Fear.
 Close your eyes tight—
 and slowly pace—
 as if
 you were walking
 a tight-rope
 taut-smooth.
 As if
 for a minute,
 face to face
 you remained
 with the only
 infinite truth.

XV

I'm happy.
 That sounding march,
 like a deep-running river,
 bears on its surface
 my body's light frame.
 I know for certain—
 now
 and for ever,
 that minute's
 within me—
 yes, that very same.

¹ The last two lines of a famous Russian revolutionary funeral march.

I'm happy
 that I'm
 a small part of that power,
 that even tears
 are common to us.
 One cannot partake
 of anything greater
 and purer
 than that mightiest of feelings—
 called class.
 Bannerets
 once more
 bow down their wings,
 in order
 to-morrow
 to rise in the fight.
 "We ourselves, dear one, are closing
 For ever thine eyes' eagled sight."¹
 Not to fall,
 grip firmer the ground.
 The banners blow black,
 red-eyelids swell,
 We pass the mausoleum—
 slowing down
 to give to Ilyich
 our last farewell.
 They performed the ceremony.
 Spoke their speeches.
 Said their say—
 and well enough.
 What minutes
 can hold
 the sorrow of so many?
 What words
 embrace
 so great a love?
 They pass—
 and look up,
 almost cautiously
 watching
 the snow-sprinkled
 circle of black.

¹ Extract from a Russian revolutionary hymn.

in order to multiply
all we have witnessed
in a storm of rebellion,
work,
and poem.

And then,
far away,
there
where the red flag's hoist,
in the frost,
through the dying volley-charge
someone voiced :
" Forward March ! "

But that command
is hardly needed—
Breathe more even
firmer yet,
only with labour
our leaded-bodies lifted,
down to the square
we hammer our tread.

Red banners
in hands still firmer clasped
rise once more overhead,
wind caught.

In a torrential tread,
power whirls past
widening,
dispersing—a world in thought.

A common thought,
in which all-impelling
worker,
peasant
and soldier are bound :

How will
the republic
get on without Lenin ?
He must be replaced—
but by whom ?
And how ?

Enough of bed-sprawling,
bug-ridden
and sleepy :

In the grown-up's footsteps
fresh feet press—
Tra-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta,
tra-ta-ta-ta-ta,
“ One
two
three
Pioneers are we
We fear not Fascists
nor their friends—
we fight for liberty ”
The fist of Europe
is clenched
in vain.
We'll crush them to dust.
Stand back !
No stealth !
To the greatest communist-genius—
death came—
to very Ilyich himself.
Above the stacks
a forest is hurled,
the arms of the millions
unite and merge,
bearing Red Square—
a Red Banner unfurled,
and thrust it aloft
with a terrible urge.
With that banner,
with every fold,
once more,
challenging,
Lenin leads :
Workers
arise—
for the last fight resolved !
Straighten your backs—
unbend your knees !
Proletarian army,
there's no time to pause.
Long live Revolution,
joyful and swift to be !

¹ From a song of the Soviet Children's Organisation : " The Young Pioneers."

This
is the greatest
of all great wars
ever known
to history.

Translated by Herbert Marshall.
1936-1938—Caucasus—Moscow—London.



Illustration to "THE S.S. NETTE," by B. Steyman (1935).

TO COMRADE NETTE:¹ MAN AND SHIP
(1926)

It wasn't an unearthly shock—
Not a shade from death's door.
Into the port,
blazing
like molten summer,
entered
and turning, made straight for the dock,
Comrade "Theodore
Nette."
It is—he
I recognised him.
In saucer-like goggles of life-saving belts.
"—Greetings, Nette :
Gee, I'm glad that you're alive
in running cables,
grapnels,
and life-smoking funnels.
Come over here :
Or is it shallow for you to be in ?
From Batum, eh ?
How your boilers steam
Remember, Nette,—
when, a human being
in a Dip-Coupé,²
you drank tea with me ?
Took your time,
while others snored in oblivion.
Eyed
sidelong,
diplomatic seals,
chatted en route
about Romke Jacobson³

¹ Theodore Nette was a Latvian Bolshevik, a friend of Mayakovsky. He became a Diplomatic Courier for the Soviet Government, and one day, while he was travelling from Latvia to Russia in a "Diplomatic Coupé," "Whites" attempted to steal his diplomatic bag. A struggle ensued in the corridor. He fought them off with his revolver, killing both his assailants, saving his country's documents, but himself being killed in the process. Later a Soviet Steamship on the Black Sea was named after him.

² Diplomatic Coupé.

⁹ A Russian Literary Critic.

and so comically swotted
 poetic rules.
 Dropped asleep at dawn.
 Finger
 cramped round the trigger . . .
 Butt in—
 those who like a trip :
 And just a year ago
 who'd have figured
 I'd meet with you again—
 as a ship.
 Beyond your stern the moon—
 Gee, it's great :
 Cutting space in half
 as it sets,
 Trailing tracks of heroes
 for ever in its wake,
 bright and bloody
 from corridor combats.
 Communism from books
 is easy belief.
 (To serve it up
 in books . . .
 is fashionable.)
 But this—
 brings " rigmarole " to life,
 and shows us
 communism
 in flesh and blood.
 We live,
 firm-clenched
 in an iron oath.
 For that—
 we're crucified
 and bullets fleer :
 that the world shall be
 one human commonwealth,
 without any Russia,
 without any Latvia.
 Blood runs in our veins
 not water pallid.
 We march on,
 through revolver barks,



Illustration to "VERY GOOD," (p. 126) by I. Shabanov (1940).



1
КРЕСТЬЯНИ ВЪПРАШАЮТ
ПРЕДСТАВИТЕЛЯ
СЪВЕТСКОГО
ПРАВИТЕЛЬСТВА



2
ТРАНСПОРТ ПЕРВОГО КЛАССА
СОВЕТСКОГО
СОЮЗНОГО ПАРКА



3
ПЕШЕХОДЫ НЕ МОГУТ
ПРОЙТИ ПОД ПЕШЕХОДНЫМ
ПЕШЕХОДНЫМ



4
ВНЕШНИЙ ПОСЛАНИЕ НЕ МОЖЕТ
ПРОЙТИ ЧЕРЕЗ СОВЕТСКОЕ
ПРАВИТЕЛЬСТВО



5
ПЕШЕХОДЫ НЕ МОГУТ
ПРОЙТИ ПОД ПЕШЕХОДНЫМ
ПЕШЕХОДНЫМ



6
ПЕШЕХОДЫ НЕ МОГУТ
ПРОЙТИ ПОД ПЕШЕХОДНЫМ
ПЕШЕХОДНЫМ



7
ПЕШЕХОДЫ НЕ МОГУТ
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ПЕШЕХОДНЫМ



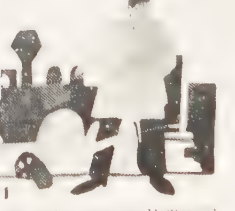
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"INCREASE IN FARES" poster by Mayakovskiy (1922).
Translation on page 125

that
 dying,
 we shall be embodied
 in ships,
 in poems,
 and other long-lived works.
 I want to live and live,
 through the years whirl fleet,
 But at the end I want—
 no other wish lives yet—
 My hour of death
 I want to meet
 as death was met
 by Comrade Theodore Nette.

15th July, 1926.
 Yalta, Crimea.

Translated by Herbert Marshall.

TRANSLATION TO "INCREASE IN FARES"

1. Peasants—look at these pictures here,
 And you'll understand why fares are more dear.
2. Transport was ruined by foreign intervention,
 Now it's partly set right by Soviet invention.
3. And everyone who wants to may
 Travel by night and travel by day.
4. The queue of passengers has no end,
 They take their food, they take a friend.
5. The engine drives on, doesn't rest for a minute.
6. But the cash-box has got only 50 kopeks in it !
7. For the ordinary chap pays a very cheap rate,
8. While the cost of repairs must be met by the State,
9. Who takes, like a beggar, a five-kopek piece,
10. While the merchants rake in their thousands apiece !
11. There's the rub—for transport to get proper repairs,
12. It's necessary to increase the cost of its fares.

*Poster issued by the GLAVPOLIT PRO SVET (Chief Political Education Committee)
 No. 250, 1922.*

Translated by Herbert Marshall.

VERY GOOD

(1927)

Extract from the poem "October"

I've seen
 all I could
 of this world
 and its goods—
 and life is so good,
 to live
 is the goods !

But in our bustle's
 more fighting,
 more hustle,
 a much tougher tussle.

The snake street
 winds
 to a house I know

The street
 —is *mine*.

The house
 —my *own*.

Shops stand in rows
 gaping windows
 full of food
 wine and fruit.

Muslin
 keeps off flies,
 cheese
 '—fresh, untainted.
 "Reduction in Price"
 by lamps
 illuminated.

My co-operative
 starts to be operative.
 Kopeks recruit.
 That's
 very good.
 I breast

the windowed heap of books.
 My own name
 in poetical rubric.
 Makes me glad
 —those are my works
 merging with the work
 of my Republic.

Dust is wheeled
 by rubber tyres.
 In my
 automobile
 ride my
 deputies
 to hold a meeting
 in that red building.
 Sit
 —but don't get set

in my
 MosSoviet.¹
 Revolvered official,
 Ruddy face ashine.
 That's my
 militia.

Guards me
 and mine.
 Baton directs,
 Right
 is the road.

I go to the right.
 'That's
 very good.

The sky
 high above me
 silky-blue.
 Life

was really
 never .
 so good !

Sky-skaters
 whizz-by

¹ Moscow Soviet.

aviators.

Those aviators

belong to me.

Like a towering tree I rose.

Into the middle of next week

they'll

knock

my foes.

Regiments

pass by

right by my side.

Brave drums

a-beat,

rat

-a-tat-tact

Stamp

stern

their feet,

heads up

erect.

For defence

they're arming

that's the red-star men.

Marching

in fours

feet

beat

in

time :

My

foe

is

yours.

Your

foe

is

mine. °

They're coming ?

Very good.

We'll stop 'em

For good.

Chiff-achuff
—engine runs.
My cars
and tractors.
Pouf-a-puff, work hums
in my
factories.
Swish quicker
you machines
and never,
never desist.
Make more
crêpe-de-chine
for my
young communists !

Sweet blows
the breeze
through leaves
o' the wood.
Blown air-
scented

O
so
good !

Beyond the town
—meadowlands.
In the meadows
—cottages.
In the cottages
—farmer-lads
Bushy-beards
cabbages.
Dad's rest
by the hearth.
All of 'em
crafty.
Plough the earth,
make poetry.

Whatever barn
from early morn

like busy bees.
Sowing,
 baking
bread for me.
Ploughing,
 milking
catching fish ;
our new republic
growing rich.

Other lands'
 old and indifferent.
Their history
 a gaping grave.

But my land's young
 and different.
Free to imagine,
 create
 and brave.

Gladness gushes.
 Would you like a bucketful ?
Life is beautiful
 and wonderful.

We'll live
 to longevity,
never reaching
 senility.
From year to year
 shall be
greater
 our mastery.
Praise,
 hammer
 and poetry,
young land
 of posterity.

Translated by Herbert Marshall.

MAYAKOVSKY IN ACTION :

A PORTRAIT

ON THE CAPTAIN'S BRIDGE

By LEO KASSIL.



THE Moscow Polytechnical Museum is besieged. Queues surging in disorder. Barriers are quaking. Crowd-pressure brushes all posters off the walls. The administrator is in a stew . . . he pops in and out of his box-office pigeon-hole like a bald cuckoo. He repeatedly requests the militia to clear the vestibule. Glass quivers. The doorsprings moan. Hubbub. And Mayakovsky himself can't get into his own evening. It turns out he is held in ransom by the besiegers. They demand a price from him : 50 entrance tickets . . . all right, 20 ! . . . Then they'll release him. But he's already given away dozens of free passes and tickets. He has none left . . . cleaned right out. So Mayakovsky begins to force his way through to the entrance. He begins to push, heave, ram like a hemmed-in icebreaker. Then suddenly he passes through the very press of the crowd with remarkable ease.

"He went through them, like a hot iron through snow," remarked Shklovsky.

The hall is overcrowded. The public in the front rows is complaining. People are sitting in the gangways, on the stairways, on the edge of the stage, on each other's knees.

Not another ticket left. That's definite.

Mayakovsky fills the tiny dressing room to overflowing. It quivers as he paces to and fro. He is cramped. He has great wide shoulders. In the corner of his mouth—a fag-end. Chewed like a bit.

Up the stairs comes the noise of the siege :

MA-YA-KOV-SKY ! . . .

PLEASE—LET-US-IN ! . . .

Vladimir Vladimirovitch says to me, almost in confusion : " Kassilchik, please . . . go to the administrator. I haven't got any more cheek. There's some Komsomols waiting, members of poetry study circles. I promised them. Get him to let five of them in . . . maybe . . . eight, well . . . say

ten. Beat your chest, pull your hair, break your heart, and swear that these are the last. He'll believe you. He's believed it nine times already!"

By now the refractory audience is stamping from impatience. And Mayakovsky comes on. His appearance on the stage brings forth a burst of merry and welcoming clapping from the crater of the hall. Friends and companions in arms escort him on to the stage.

In one hand he holds a portfolio, in the other a glass of tea. The stage trembles under his steps. He shifts the table. Lays down his books in order. Poems. Paper. Watch. The spoon tinkles in the glass. He makes himself at home. Takes his bearings, and is eyed by the public. He throws back the lapels of his jacket, sticks his hands behind in his belt: taking on an almost sportive pose.

"To-night," he begins, "I (he roars) . . . shall . . . (and then announces the programme of the evening) . . . after the lecture there will be an interval for me to rest and for the public to express its delight."

"But when will you read your poems?" mincingly some girl asks.

"Aha, you want the most interesting stuff to start right away?" Mayakovsky replied in a similar mincing tone, but with a bass voice.

The first peal of subdued laughter rolled through the hall. But the audience stores up its still hidden pleasure. And Mayakovsky rumbles through his lecture. Though really it isn't a lecture. It's a brilliant discussion, a most convincing story, a stormy monologue, a fiery speech. Full of the most interesting information, facts, raging demands, happiness, indignation, daring assertions, curiosities, aphorisms, parodies, epigrams, keen thoughts, provoking jokes, striking examples, blazing attacks and acute formulas. Murderous deadly-aimed definitions and lashing jokes fall on to the heads and shoulders of the knights of philistine art, the stern indignation of the poet crashes upon them. Mayakovsky speaks. Stenographers write: "Laughter and applause . . . general laughter . . . stormy applause."

Notes fly down to the stage from all corners of the hall. Offended ones shout. Others hiss them. The offended ones are insulted. "Commotion in the hall," the stenographers record.

"Don't get frisky, comrades," replies Mayakovsky. He doesn't raise his voice a bit. But the thunder of his bass easily covers the noise of the whole meeting. "Don't get frisky . . . once I've begun speaking, it means, I shall end speaking. There isn't a man yet born who could out-shout me. You'll sit here like the damned and listen . . . Hey, you there, in the third row, don't wave your gold tooth so threateningly. Sit down. And you put away that newspaper at once or leave the hall. Here you've got to listen to me, and not read. What? You're not interested, here you are then, here's a tanner for your ticket. You may consider yourself at liberty. And

you there—shut your door. What's the idea, flapping your jaw open like that. You're not a man, you're a cupboard."

Mayakovsky is warm. He takes off his jacket, and folds it accurately. Puts it on the table. Hitches up his trousers.

"I'm at work here. I'm hot. Have I the right to improve my conditions of work. Undoubtedly."

A certain shocked dame cries almost hysterically: "Mayakovsky! What are you pulling up your trousers like that for? It's disgusting to look at."

Mayakovsky asks politely, "And if they drop, they'll be pleasant for you to look at, eh?"

Lightning-like answers strike all those attempting to catch the poet.

"Your jokes don't reach my understanding," bristles up a non-understanding one.

"You—are a giraffe," exclaims Mayakovsky. "Only a giraffe can wet his feet on Monday and not catch a cold till Sunday."

His opponents wilt. Stenographers put down a grammalogue meaning general applause of whole meeting.

Suddenly a bold young man jumps up.

"Mayakovsky," he cries challengingly, "do you take us all to be idiots then?"

"Now, now . . ." says Mayakovsky in surprise, "why all? So far I only see one standing before me."

Someone in horn-rimmed glasses and glittering tie mounts the stage and, without asking permission, declares heatedly and complainingly that "Mayakovsky is already a corpse and no poetry can be expected of him." The hall is indignant. The orator, unconfused, continues to slay Mayakovsky.

"That's strange," Mayakovsky said thoughtfully, "I'm the corpse, yet it's he that stinks."

That put the lid on that orator. When the laughter died away, in one of the corners of the hall someone else begins to shout in dissatisfaction.

"If you're going to make so much noise," said Mayakovsky persuasively, "it'll be the worse for you: I'll let loose the last orator on to you."

A fat little fellow clambers on the stage, bumping people aside in the process. He charged Mayakovsky with gigantomania.

"I must remind Comrade Mayakovsky," he said heatedly, "remind him of an old adage, which was known even to Napoleon: from the sublime to the ridiculous is but one step . . ."

In that very second, lifting his leg elephant-like, Mayakovsky silently took one great stride covering the distance between himself and the now bewildered chatterer.

"From the sublime to the ridiculous just one step!" and the hall bursts with laughter.

The conversation then turned, as it always does, to the classics, to their critical assimilation.

Someone from the Rights shouts scathingly:

"Aha! Mayakovsky's been grabbed by the behind!"

"Well, and what are you crowing about?" replied Vladimir Vladimirovitch. "Sure for us that's a behind. But, for you—it takes the place of your literary face."

Literator "A," who all the time has been passing remarks shouting from his seat and demanding the floor, suddenly gets it . . . when it turns out that he has "changed his mind, and in general wasn't prepared. . . ."

Mayakovsky states triumphantly: "Owing to wet weather fireworks postponed indefinitely."

Then he reads his poems. The whole hall, opponents and supporters, cools into an attentive, tense silence. With unrivalled mastery Mayakovsky recites. His famous voice rings out bold and sincere, filling every nook and cranny of the museum hall. Even the attendants, who have heard many, many things in that hall, listen spellbound. The militiaman and fireman on duty stand with mouths agape.

Mayakovsky recites: "Very Good."

The excited hall thunders madly. They clap, stamp, shout, cheer . . . die down, thunder again . . . then Mayakovsky reads on . . . again the hall is stock-still. When, suddenly, from the second row a certain fat and bearded individual gets up noisily, and marches through the hall to the exit. His great beard lies on his fat chest like on a tray. Unperturbed by the hissing around him he makes his way out.

"What's that bearded personage making his exit for?" Mayakovsky asks threateningly. But the personage continues unceremoniously to carry his beard to the exit. And suddenly Mayakovsky says in absolute seriousness, and almost as if apologising: "The citizen has gone for a shave."

The hall splits with laughter. The bearded one, now quite dispirited and indignant disappears through the door. Even the stenographers clap. And all around even the most stolid people are laughing to tears, almost in hysterics. . . .

Afterwards Mayakovsky replies to questions. With amazing, ruthless and inexhaustible wit he replies to the stinging questions of his opponents, to the questions of the curious philistine, to the queries of the literary fan.

"Mayakovsky! How much do you get paid for this evening's meeting?" "And what's it to do with you? You won't get a penny out of it anyway. . . . Next."—"What is your real name?" Mayakovsky, with a secretive air, bends towards the public: "Shall I tell?—Pushkin. . . ."—"Could a second Mayakovsky appear, say in Mexico?" "Hm . . . why not. . . . I may go there again, maybe marry . . . then a second Mayakovsky might appear."—"Your poems are too topical. To-morrow they'll be dead. You'll soon be forgotten. Immortality won't be your lot." "Well, you come and see me in a thousand years' time. Then we'll see."—"Your last poem was too long." "Well, shorten it. You can stick your own name on the cut-outs."—"Mayakovsky, you said that from time to time you must clean yourself free of adhering traditions and habits. If you must clean yourself, then you must be dirty." "And you don't wash yourself and think yourself clean, eh?"—"Mayakovsky, it's about time you chucked out those sitting behind your back." Mayakovsky quickly turned his back to the audience: "There, now I completely agree with the proposal," he laughed over his shoulder.—"What's this? Ah, a familiar handwriting. I was waiting for this. At last it comes: 'Your poems are not understood by the masses.' So you're here. I've been waiting a long time to pull your ears. I'm just about fed up with you. Here's another: 'My comrades and I read your poems and didn't understand anything.' You must choose more clever comrades."—"Mayakovsky, with what part of you do you think you're a poet of the revolution." "In the place diametrically opposite to where that question was born."—"Mayakovsky, you consider yourself a proletarian poet-collectivist, and you're always writing I, I, I." "Well, what do you think. Nicholas the Second, was he a collectivist? He always wrote *We*. *We*, Nicholas the Second. . . ."

And then in a break between bursts of laughter, he again continues, seriously and untiringly, the fight for the political poetry of our day.

The evening has ended. The Polytechnical Museum has emptied. We are riding home. Vladimir Vladimirovitch is tired. He is full of impressions and written questions. Pieces of paper stick out from all his pockets.

"Gets one tired," he said, "I'm knocked out. Trousers got nothing to hang on to! But it's interesting. I love it. Love to talk . . . and the public—no matter their ages, they all come: they respect me; they know, the devils! That evening-class student in the balcony . . . surprisingly true grasp! It's a pleasure. Fine lads. . . ."

"Didn't I get a good one over that fellow with the beard? Eh?"

Translated by Herbert Marshall.



CARICATURE OF MAYAKOVSKY (AS THE EQUESTRIAN STATUE OF PETER THE GREAT) CRUSHING THE CRITIC POLONSKY, *By the Kukryniksi.*

THE LAST OF MAYAKOVSKY

TWENTY YEARS

An Exhibition of the Life and Work of Mayakovsky,
1930.

*

IN the foreword to the catalogue of this exhibition Mayakovsky wrote this about himself: "The work of the revolutionary poet does not stop at the book; meetings, speeches, front-line limericks, one-day agit-prop playlets, the living radio-voice and the slogan flashing by on the trams—are all equal and sometimes very valuable examples of poetry.

"On opening Mayakovsky's exhibition, we do not intend to deaden his work, which is so full of life, by a lifeless precise resumé of his work. Vladimir Mayakovsky is first of all a poet-agitator, a poet-propagandist, a poet who in every line of his work shows the desire to be an active participant in Socialist construction. Mayakovsky's main work developed in the last twelve years of the revolution. To-day's exhibition ought to broaden the outlook on a poet's work of everyone just beginning to work in the art of the word. The newspaper, the poster, the slogan, the debate, the advertisement, so often despised by the pure lyricists, the æsthetes—are shown here as a most important type of literary weapon. At our exhibition only the more important part of the work is shown—only newspapers and magazines that contained his verses, our as well as foreign reviews, a small number of programmes, some characteristic biographies and samples of diverse types of his work. The detailed collection of his work and complete resumé of it will be done by the laboratory and arsenal of Mayakovsky."

The exhibition was opened on 1st February, 1930, in the Club of the Authors' Federation. At this opening Mayakovsky read for the first time—"At the Top of My Voice" from his poem on the Five Year Plan. When the exhibition was finished in the Author's Club, it was transferred to the working-class districts at the request of workmen's organizations. It opened again in the middle of March in the "House of the Komsomols" in the Red Presnia District of Moscow. On the 25th March an evening was held in the "House of the Komsomols" to celebrate twenty years

of Mayakovsky's activity. This was the last public appearance of Mayakovsky. In a very abbreviated edition a report was printed in a special number of the *Komsomol Pravda* and *Literary Gazette* in memory of Mayakovsky on the 17th April, 1930. The following are extracts from the verbatim report of that meeting.

Mayakovsky : The comrade president has very gorgeously introduced my lecture about my work. I do not intend to give a lecture and don't know whether you can call what I have done creative art. That is not the point, comrades. Twenty years—it's easy enough to have a celebration, to collect some books, choose a bearded presidium, tell a dozen people about your own merits, beg a few friends in the press not to swear about you too much but write a complimentary article about you, and lo and behold something nice might turn up for you. You might become a "recognised" poet, or even something more interesting for an author's heart might happen.

But this is not the point, comrades : the poet of the old days who was read and listened to mostly by "young ladies" and "young men" in smart salons is dead forever and only the working-class auditorium, only the proletarian masses, those that are now building our new life are fit listeners and readers, and I can only be the poet of these people. There are two difficulties. It's easy enough to write poetry that does not irritate anybody :—March, march again you working men—Comrade Komsomol build a great mole. The Red Flag waves higher like the flame of a fire—etc. It will be liked very much and forgotten the next day. I did not work all my life to caress the human ear by writing pretty poetry. No, on the contrary, I have always managed to upset somebody. My main work—is criticising all that I think is wrong, against which I must fight. And twenty years of my literary work has actually been a literary boxing match in the best sense of the word. . . .

I came here to you to-day quite ill, I don't know what is happening to my throat, maybe I shall have to give up reading for a long time. Maybe to-day it would be better to read a few things for those comrades who have not heard them yet. It is very difficult to work, in the way I want to work, trying to establish real contact between the working auditorium and big poetry, poetry genuinely created and without ever lowering its standard and its meaning. There are, I repeat, two difficulties. Poets often write so that you can't understand them. It happens quite often even to our quite famous poets. Very often a poet writes in such a way that it's quite unintelligible, or if it is intelligible it's just nonsense. Poetry must be made so that without getting rid of the seriousness of your idea, you make your verses necessary to the masses, so that when one has read it about five times you say, well, it was hard to understand, but having

grasped it, it enriched our brain, our imagination and it has sharpened our will in the fight for socialism.

Secondly: very often our auditorium is hardly literate. Again one of my favourite examples. Comrade Shafir in 1923 published a book about what a peasant of Voronezh district really does know and understand. At that time there was an agricultural exhibition and there was a lot of talk about the "pavilions" so he asked the peasants whether they understood the word "pavilion." It transpired that no one knew. One lifted his arm at last and said: "I know, it's the one that is the boss, that gives orders here."

These are the two main difficulties. The habit of authors to write in the language of the intelligentsia, separate from the language of the masses, the language of the drawing rooms, that was called a literary style. The interest of it was very narrow and dealt mostly with subjects of love and drawing-room drama. On the other side you still see a very low standard of culture, which mind you, rises every day, and rises fast, but is still rather low.¹ It partly prevents the communion of the author with his readers. The poet often does not get any response because his reader simply does not know what the poet is talking about. That means that you have those two difficulties, one of writing so that it should be clear to the masses, without lowering your standard, and one of understanding the author. . . .

The idea of this exhibition is to prove that a revolutionary writer is not a decadent, whose verse after having been published gets all dusty on the top shelf, but that a revolutionary writer takes a very active part in the everyday life and building of Socialism. The aesthetes are swearing at me: "You used to write such remarkable things as 'The Cloud in Trousers' and now look at your stuff." I always said there is poetry of a technical kind and poetry of the masses armed with a different kind of weapon, weapons of the working classes. I never wrote doggerel, on the other hand I have never refused to write on any theme, beginning by verses about the Kulaks and ending about cat's-furs at the 'Gostorg.'² On the other hand I have often spoken about the individual infiltration into production.

It's been often said that an author must go and study production. But it does not mean that some fellow . . . having bought a sixpenny note-book, goes to the factory, gets into everybody's way, gets into a mess amongst machinery and then writes all sorts of rubbish in the newspapers. Then the factory organizations start swearing about misinformed writing of factory life. I believe that you have got actually to work in production, but if that is not possible at least to take part in all the everyday occurrences of the working class. I understand this work about the importance of obeying

¹In 1930, remember.

²State Trading Store.

the slogans about safety, those that tell you not to put your hands into machinery, the greatest care about electric currents endangering the life of the workmen, care that nails should not be left lying on staircases, not to touch engineering belts, etc.

This appeals to my pen and my rhymes and I consider it's more important than the most inspired themes of the long-haired lyricists. Why must I write about the love of Jack and Jill but not consider myself as a part of this state that is building a new life? The main object of this exhibition is to show you that a poet is not one who goes about like a curly lamb bleating on love themes, but one who in our sharp class battle gives his pen up to the arsenal of the proletariat and does not scorn any dirty and hard work, any theme about the revolution, or of building a people's management of agriculture, and writes propaganda verse on any of these themes. . . .

I do not intend to give elaborate dissertations here to-day. I only have to say a few of these preparatory explanations so that the lads here can ask me questions, offer suggestions about future work, and any practical suggestions, etc., etc. I shall go on with a reading of my poetry. (*Reads.*)

There was a break of two-three years in my work when I did not write any poetry at all, I was busy with painting and drawing then. Only from the years 1912-13 I started regularly publishing my things, and literature definitely became my profession.

I have read you some things of 1912. I must say that these things are a bit complicated and they often have been criticized as incomprehensible. So the question of a clear meaning for everybody rose in front of me, and I started to write more for the masses. (*Reads.*)

I shall now read a few things, as you can't judge by only one thing. My last word is about the exhibition as it fully explains and defines what I do, for what I am working really. . . .

Very often, lately, those who are annoyed by my literary-publicist work, say that I have forgotten how to write poetry and for that posterity will give it me hot. I am a determined fellow—I want myself to speak with my descendants, and not to wait and see what my critics in the future will tell them. Therefore, I address myself direct to posterity in my poem—At the Top of my Voice. (*Reads.*)

AT THE TOP OF MY VOICE

(1930)

First Prelude to a poem of the Five Year Plan¹

Most respected

comrades heirs and descendants :

¹ A second prelude, a love-lyric, was left incomplete when the author committed suicide on 14th April, 1930, about three weeks from the date of this meeting.



This bust of VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY, the work of Miss Fredda Brilliant, was made for the Moscow Artists Organisation—Vsyekokhudozhnik

Excavating

our contemporary
petrified muck
studying our days through dark dead centuries,
you'll,

maybe,

ask about me, Mayakovsky.

And, maybe,

your scholars will then reveal,—
swamping with erudition
questions that swarm,—
there lived once a singer
blood all-a-boil,
who hated most cold-water raw.

Professor,

take off those optical-bicycles !

I'll myself relate

about the times

about myself.

I'm a sanitary inspector

and water-carrier,

mobilised to the front

by revolution,

I came

from the seignorial horticulture

of poetry

a most capricious dame.

precious Muse that grows, like Mary,

roses

round

a bungalow.

" Mary, Mary, quite contrary,

how does your garden grow ? "

Some pour verses from a sprinkler,

some just splutter

from their lips—

curly-headed Mitraikies,

muddle-headed Kudraikies¹—

who the devil knows which from which :

No quarantine will take them in—

there's those mandolines again :

¹ Two would-be poets who have long since been forgotten.

"Tara-tina tara-tina
t e n n . . ."

Not much of an honour,
that from such roses
my very own statue will rise
over squares,
with gobs of tuberculosis,
where whores with hooligans
and—syphilis...

I'm fed
to the teeth
with agit-prop,

I'd like
to scribble for you
love-ballads,—
they're charming
and pay quite a lot.

But I
mastered myself,
and crushed under foot
the throat
of my very own songs.

Hi listen !
Comrades heirs and descendants,
to an agitator,
loud-speaker-in-chief :

Deafening
poetic deluge,

I stride to you
through lyrical volumes,
as the live
with the living speaks.

I'll come to you
in the distant communist far-off,
but not

like Yessenin's rhymed knight-errants.
My verse will reach
over the peaks of eras
far over the heads
of poets and governments.

My verse will come,
but will come not ornate,—

not like an arrow's
 lyrical love-flight from Eros,
 not like a worn-out coin
 comes to the numismat
 and not like the light of long-dead stars arrives.
 My verse
 with labour
 thrusts through weighted years
 emerging,
 ponderous,
 rock-rough,
 age-grim,
 as when to-day
 an aqueduct appears,
 firm-grounded once
 by the branded slaves of Rome.
 You'll accidentally find
 in barrows of books,
 wrought-iron lines of long-buried poems,
 handle them
 with the care that respects
 ancient
 but terrible weapons.
 My words
 are not used
 to caressing ears ;
 nor titillate
 with semi-obscenities
 maiden ears
 hidden in hair so innocent.
 I open on parade
 my pages of fighters,
 pass in review
 their lineal front.
 My verses stand
 in lead-heavy letters,
 ready for death
 and for deathless glory.
 Stock-still stand my poems
 muzzle to muzzle set,
 their gaping titles aimed
 and at the ready !
 And weapons most belovéd yet,

ever ready to
 charge with a cheer,
rear all alert
 my cavalry of wit,
tilting their rhymes,
 sharp-pointed spears.
And every single one
 armed to the teeth,
that swept through twenty years
 victorious,
every single one,
 to the very last leaf
I give to you,
 planet-proletariat.
The foe
 of the working class colossal—
is my own foe,
 dead-poisonous and ancient.
We marched behind the blood-red flag—
 impelled
by years of work
 and days of sheer starvation.
We opened
 Marx and Engels
 every tome,
as in our home
 we open wide the shutters,
but without reading
 we understood alone,
whose side we're on
 and in which camp we're fighters.
And not from Hegel
 did we learn
 our dialectics.
That burst
 through interclashing conflict
 into verse,
when under fire
 the bourgeois
 ran from our attacks,
as we
 once also
 ran from theirs.

Let glory,
 disconsolate widow frail,
 trudge after genius
 in funeral anthems.
 Die, my verse,
 die, like the rank and file,
 as our unknown, unnumbered, fell
 in storming heaven.
 To hell
 with many-tonned bronzes,
 To the devil
 with sleek marble slime !
 We'll square up with glory,—
 why, we're mates and brothers,—
 So let there be
 a common monument for us
 built up in battles—
 socialism.
 Descendants,
 in your lexicons
 look up the flotsam
 that floats down from Lethe,
 odd remnant-words
 like "prostitution,"
 "tuberculosis,"
 "blockades."
 For you,
 who're so healthy and nimble,
 a poet
 licked up
 consumptive spittle
 with the crude rough tongue of placards.
 From the tail of the years
 I must resemble
 a long-tailed monster
 from a fossilized age.
 So come,
 Comrade Life,
 let's step hard on the throttle,
 and roar out
 the Five-Year-Plan's
 remnant days.

I haven't got
 a ruble
 left from my verse,
 the cabinet-makers
 didn't send the furniture home.
 But my only need's
 a clean-laundered shirt,
 for the rest
 I honestly
 don't give a damn.
 When I appear
 in Tsi-Ka-Ka¹
 of coming
 bright decades,
 above the band
 of skin-flint grafters
 in rhymes,
 I'll lift up high,
 like a Bolshevik party-card,
 all the hundred books
 of my
 ComParty poems !

(The poem was well received. Mayakovsky continued :)

I read to you the last and most difficult of my poetry, made most conscientiously, and the fact that it reached you is very, very interesting. It means that without lowering the standard of our technique we must concentrate on working only for the reader of the working classes.

The Chairman : Comrades, Mayakovsky is very tired and ought to rest, we shall go on with the discussions.

(There followed discussions and questions, to which Mayakovsky rose to reply.)

Mayakovsky : Comrades, there is a lot of notes here, but comparatively few questions, simply many notes repeat themselves. Very often a request to read a certain piece of poetry. Then a number of questions as to *why* I use rude words. A comrade says here that you cannot build socialism on using rude words in writing when you don't use them in life. It's naïve to think that I wanted to build something on those words. The comrade was right—you can't build socialism on any words. I did not use

¹ Russian abbreviation for C.C.C. = the Central Control Commission of the Communist Party of the S.U.

those words for that. I love it when a poet closing his eyes to all reality sweetly sings his sounds, but supposing one took him like a puppy and pushed his nose right into life. It's only as poetical technique. I have also been often told off for using the word "svoloch" (meaning *scum*). I use that word because it's often used in life. As long as that word exists I shall use it in verse. I cannot annihilate the word "svoloch" for "æsthetic" reasons, and so I use it in its fullest sense. . . .

There is a note here: "Would you write iambics in the interests of the proletarian revolution?" I say, yes, I would. . . .

I want some help in my work. But even to-day I need to prove that I need extra room for my activity, three comrades here have proven that without extra room for it I cannot get on with the work. On the thirteenth year of the revolution I am under the impression that I need help. This exhibition is not a jubilee, it's an account of my work. I demand help—not the glorification of non-existent virtues. That's what we are talking about, comrades, and not about glorifying private persons. There was only one critical voice here to-day. I am sure that there are more critical remarks than that in the auditorium. Maybe people did not want to spoil this festive day by pouring a spoonful of tar into the barrel of honey of their friendliness. I am not in the least against self-criticism. But I won't tolerate lies. A comrade here says that I am destroying the classics wholesale. I have never done anything so stupid.

I am only saying that there are no classics topical for all times. Study them, love them in their time, but don't let them stand and bar the way with their enormous bronze behinds to the young poet who has everything in front of him. I am not speaking only about myself, but of thousands of poets who will emerge from the working classes. It would be a wicked lie to tell a young workman who cannot spell, but will write poetry twenty times better than I—give up that job you won't succeed, we have got Mayakovsky, he does that sort of thing. If I ever fight against the classics it's not for the destruction of them. I would like them to be studied, analysed and only that which is useful for the working classes used. But you can't take them for granted. . . .

Mayakovsky then read more of his verse and finished by saying: "Maybe we'd better end on this. My throat refuses to go on." (*The auditorium applauded Mayakovsky.*)

Translated by Herbert Marshall.

MAYAKOVSKY MEASURED

"MAYAKOVSKY EMERGES"

Review of A Narrative in Verse by N. Aseyev

By SEMYON TREGUB

*

APRIL, 1940, marked the tenth anniversary of the death of Vladimir Mayakovsky, regarded as the finest and most talented of Soviet poets. This date was commemorated by the whole literary world. Publishing houses published new editions of Mayakovsky's books, newspapers and periodicals carried articles about him, and literary evenings were arranged in his memory.

Several books devoted to his life and work have already appeared in the Soviet Union. A prominent place among these is held by a narrative in verse written by Nikolai Aseyev, a colleague and friend of Mayakovsky's.

This work ranks with those masterpieces which combine breadth of historic sweep with profundity of knowledge; keenness of observation with literary vigour; deep tenderness with artistic passion and strength. It is polemical, explosive; each of its seventeen chapters is imbued with the very spirit of Mayakovsky. Having delineated the poet's image, Aseyev continues, through his own poem, to affirm the cause of Mayakovsky's life: the poetic, moral truth of the late poet.

Upon his very appearance on the literary arena Mayakovsky was met at the same time by diffident admiration and by the furious abuse of literary traditionalists who saw in him a fatal challenge to the reigning æsthetic ideas, and consequently to their own positions. The vehement clamour both of praise and disapprobation did not cease during the whole course of his life, nor after it. Every new work by Mayakovsky was a bone of contention both for the readers and for the professional literary critics.

He was like the great Pushkin, for "he dared to write as no one in Russia before him wrote, he had the unparalleled audacity or rather the amazing nerve to follow his own road, not taking any one of the Parnassian lawgivers as his model. . . ."

To-day Mayakovsky is a recognized classic of Soviet poetry. But even to-day his life and work do not cease to be the subjects of heated discussions. Even to-day—ten years after his death—the stormy disputes which he evoked have not abated.

Thus the illustrious Russian critic Belinsky was justified when he said : " The higher a phenomenon the more vital it is, and the more vital the phenomenon the more does its consciousness depend on the movement and development of life itself." Mayakovsky belongs to those great creative natures who by their work for the present prepare the future, and for this reason alone cannot belong to the past. They come to us as active contemporaries over " the peaks of the eras," and speak with us " as the live with the living."

The distant communist future, about which Mayakovsky thought so frequently, appeared a reality to him. It was a to-morrow which he not only saw but in which he lived ; he breathed this high-mountain air, strode along the boundless, sunny expanses of the heights, delighted in its majestic and incomparable beauty. The narrow boundary line of man's " own " physical being was crossed. Beyond it lay eternity and immortality.

When reading Nikolai Aseyev's narrative in verse, *Mayakovsky Emerges*, which has now been completed after four years' work, and through which history, biography, memoirs, scenes from life, and lyrical digressions make a scattered pattern, the reader seeks for the answer to the main question : has the artist been able to comprehend and reveal his theme precisely as " the movement and development of life itself," has he been able to cross the line separating the Mayakovsky who began in 1912 from the Mayakovsky who is beginning now, in our own days, in the mind of our own generation ? And in replying to this question in the affirmative the reader defines the meaning and purport of this poem. This lengthy work contains all the essential elements : the feeling of life, the comprehension of Mayakovsky as a poetic phenomenon, majestic, integral, continuous.

... Above the blue of rivers running deeper,
above the depths of ores rich as meat,
an age will dawn
when ascents will be steeper,
an age
when toil and sweat will be sweet.

It will come
in its fulness
for all to behold,

that flutters
 in midsummer's
 smirchless blue air.
 It seemed
 that some builder
 his workmates called Teddy
 went through
 the West End
 for a Saturday stroll,
 (a touch of bravado !
 a little bit heady !)
 who'd kick
 at the globe
 like a ball
 in the goal !
 The hair on his brow
 was the shape of a crescent.
 The cheekbones stood out,
 and the eyes burnt like coals.
 It seemed
 that each hand
 was supporting a present—
 the palms
 were held upwards
 and rounded like bowls.
 Some new kind of man
 we had never set eyes on !
 Some new kind of beauty
 had burst into view,
 with forehead
 and eyes
 that suggested horizons,
 A man
 like the mountains
 refreshed by the dew !

It is as such that the reader meets Mayakovsky in the first chapter of the poem, in the first moments of acquaintance. It is as such that he remains in his memory and his heart after reading the whole narrative. New descriptions, contrasting facets, traits, details, only make his image more firm. The richness of his nature lies in its integrity. Whatever aspect of his life we touch on we always recognise one and the same metal,

one and the same character in life and in battles. And it is in this that the great merit of Nikolai Aseyev lies, the merit of his interpretation of the image of the great poet.

For me
 Mayakovsky
 is more than a mummy
 is more
 than a wordy resemblance to fire—
 I fear
 lest his image
 prove dead as a dummy
 bereft
 of the life
 in the strings of his lyre.

This lofty anxiety has enabled Aseyev to find the image of his hero in Mayakovsky. The poet lives in the poem independently of his personal fame, as he might have lived even if he had not been the historical Mayakovsky. In his poem Aseyev has created a personality as an artist understands it, and it proved close to the real Mayakovsky, close to his creative spirit. This is the key to the poem, to its power. It is worthy of the name of the man to whom it is dedicated.

Mayakovsky was right when he said of Aseyev: "This man *can*. He has my grasp." Mayakovsky's grasp is felt in the wrathful picture of old, merchant Moscow which Aseyev has drawn; in the way he hurls hot lumps of words at the philistines and "the grown corn-chandlers' sons," at "the literary stock exchange." How passionately he defends Mayakovsky's searchings for "the pristine word, which it is sweet to repeat a hundred times!" The narrative contains many splendid verses about Georgia—Mayakovsky's homeland; about Petrograd—the city in which "to survive meant the same as to squeeze through"; about Khlebnikov—the poet and friend of Mayakovsky.

Mayakovsky's grasp is also seen in the chapter on his tragic death and in Aseyev's concluding monologue "Mayakovsky Square"—the chapter on the constant omnipresent triumph of his life.

Our friend will emerge in the coming days
 in Mexico,
 Paris,
 Caucasian ravine,
 transfixing the world with his huge-eyed gaze,
 clean-cut, keen,

EPILOGUE :

MAYAKOVSKY AND THE PRESENT WAR

AN English poet once cried, "Milton, thou shouldst be living at this hour." How much more does one feel like crying that now in this war to the death between civilisation and barbarism, in which England once more has "woken from her slumbers" and shouted her defiance to the once-seeming invincible Nazi hordes; but in her finest hour England has not yet brought forth its Milton or its Mayakovsky, and poetry is still for the drawing-room, the coteries, and the 'versities, and though England's leader spoke in inspired prose—"we shall fight in the streets"—there was no poet to trumpet "the streets shall be our brushes, the squares our palettes!" Yet if Ensa sent out an elocutionist to recite to the troops, in the rear and in the front line, serious modern and classic poetry, there might be a similar response to that which similar recitals evoke in the Soviet Union.

For it is a fact that to-day Red Army men fight and die with the pulsating beat of Mayakovsky's poetry in their hearts.

In December of 1942 Red Army private A. P. Kirillov, fighting at the Leningrad front, sent a letter to the Vladimir Mayakovsky Museum in Moscow saying that bomb shrapnel had torn through his knapsack and through the book of Mayakovsky's poems which he carried in it. In his letter Kirillov gave a detailed account of just what pages had suffered most damage and asked that a new copy of Mayakovsky's book be sent to him in place of the damaged one, which he was sending to the Museum as a memento of the war. He went on to relate that at the concert of Red Army amateur art held on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the October Revolution three soldiers from his unit had given readings of the famous Soviet poet's works.

Recently an Honoured Artist of the Republic, Sergei M. Balashov, spent six months performing for the men fighting at the front. He is an elocutionist and his whole programme is made up of monologues and poetry. Writing of his experiences he recounted the following incident:

"After giving a performance in a small village that had been reached under cover of night, the commissar of the unit called me and asked if I could select a few entertainers willing to appear before the men in the front-line trenches. I took four of our staunchest men with me and we set off, led by the commissar. The road lay through a forest. At the edge of the forest the commissar halted. 'This road is under fire,' he said. 'Do you know how to crawl on all fours?' I assured the commissar that we

could do it. The Red Army man who was leading the way crawled forward. As soon as we followed his example bullets and mortar-shells began whining unpleasantly overhead. The commissar stood at the back directing our progress. Then he too dropped down and followed.

"The dug-out that we reached by this painful process was damp and dark. But there were quite a few men waiting for us. I observed that all conversation was conducted in an undertone for fear of attracting the attention of the Germans, who would probably have attempted to interfere. 'How on earth will I be able to declaim Mayakovsky?' I wondered. The answer was not long in coming. 'For the first time in his life,' said the commissar, acting as master of ceremonies, 'Sergei Balashov will recite Mayakovsky's poem "At the Top of My Voice" in a whisper.'

"And I did."

The fundamental reason why Mayakovsky's poetry is so popular is that he wrote from within and not from some ivory tower without. He identified himself with the revolution and declared:

"All my ringing poetic power
I give to you
attacking class!"

—but again it was not given as a gift from outside; not as a weapon presented by civilians to an army, but a weapon forged in the very heat of battle and borne and wielded by him untiringly throughout his life.

As Katanyan in 1942 pointed out: "Travelling through the countries of Europe and attentively scrutinising the things around him, Mayakovsky even at that time, *seventeen years ago*, divined the clouds gathering overhead. He saw the first signs of the brown plague which broke out on the Continent to-day and threatened the whole world. He could sense the smell of the terrible new conflagration and uttered a warning; not only for his own country but for all mankind:

"Wherever
the earth
by sun is lit—
The slogan for all
should be the same—
Speak
to the fascists
with bayonet wit;
with words of bullets
and tongues of flame."

Thus Mayakovsky wrote in 1926—what modern poet could be more up-to-date?!

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Mayakovsky, Vladimir, 1893-
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Mayakovsky and his poetry

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